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Big five personality traits and coping styles predict subjective well-being: A study with a Turkish Sample

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationships among big five personality traits, coping styles and subjective well-being in a selected Turkish sample that consisted of 251 undergraduate students obtained from Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department at Marmara University. Data were collected using Subjective Well-being Scale (Tuzgöl Dost, 2005), Coping Styles Scale (Hisli Şahin and Durak, 1995) and Big Five Personality Inventory Short Form- NEO-FFI (Gülgöz, 2002). To analyze the data, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationships with personality traits, coping styles and subjective well-being. The results revealed that neuroticism was a negative predictor of subjective well-being whereas extraversion and conscientiousness were positive predictors of subjective well-being. In addition to this, self-confident coping style was found to predict subjective well-being positively while helpless coping style predicted subjective well-being negatively. These results suggest that personality traits and coping styles play significant role in explaining subjective well-being.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, research on positive psychology has grown rapidly (Compton, 2005; Faller, 2001; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). One of the focal concepts comprehensively studied in positive psychology is subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is a general term that includes individuals' general evaluation of life satisfaction

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and the positive and negative emotions they experience (Diener, 1984; Diener et al, 1999). This evaluation includes individuals' emotional responses, domain satisfactions and cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction.

Especially within the last decade, there has been a great deal of research investigating the factors that affect subjective well-being. Personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness) have been one of the important variables among these factors. Studies (Hayes and Joseph, 2003; DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Furnham and Chang, 1999; Steel, Schmidt and Shultz, 2008) showed that personality traits played a crucial role on subjective well-being. In other words, neuroticism and extraversion and agreeableness are related to subjective well-being. Neuroticism negatively predicted subjective well-being whereas agreeableness and extraversion were positive predictors of subjective well-being. It seems that extraverted people tend to be happy due to their characteristics that they are active, have fulfilling social relationships, energetic, assertive whereas neurotic people are not happy as extraverted people as they tend to be more anxious, worried, feel depressed and have communication problems with others. This study also assessed the relationships between subjective well being and personality traits of big five in a Turkish sample, and examined how personality traits predict the subjective well being.

Another factor that affects subjective well-being is coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/ or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. Coping can be done in different ways and therefore there are different strategies, such as self-confident, seeking social support, optimistic, submissive and helpless. Since coping strategies deals with problems it is no surprise to see that coping styles influence subjective well-being. There have been some studies (Clement and Nilson Schonnesson, 1998; Ko, Yoon and Park, 2007; Smedema, Catalano and Ebener, 2010) that presented data indicating the effect of coping strategies on subjective well being. Specifically, Clement and Nilson Schonnesson (1998) found that coping strategies accounted for 53% of life satisfaction. They also mentioned that ineffective coping styles (e.g. Helplessness/self-blaming) had insignificant effect on subjective well-being. Nevertheless, feelings of adequacy and high self-confidence active and self-confident strategies for coping promote psychological well-being. Again, the current investigation examines how the different kinds of coping styles predicted subjective well being.

Briefly, this study evaluates how big five personality traits and coping strategies affect the subjective well being in a Turkish sample.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 251 undergraduate students attending to Marmara University which is one of the public universities in Istanbul. 167 (66%) of these students were female and 84 (33%) of them were male. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 24 ($M=20.03$, $SD= 1.48$). All of the students voluntarily participated in this study.

2.2. Instruments

Subjective Well-Being Scale (SWBS): Subjective well-being scale (Tuzgöl Dost, 2005) is a self-report measure designed to measure subjective well-being of university students. The scale consists of 46 items. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert type self-report scale anchored by “disagree=1” and “fully agree=5”. There are 26 positive and 20 negative evaluative statements about life satisfaction, positive and negative emotionality. The highest score obtained from this scale is 230 whereas the lowest score is 46. Higher scores indicate higher degree of subjective well-being. The scale has demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha= .93$). Cronbach alpha coefficient was also found as .93 in the present study.

Coping Style Scale (CSS): Coping Style Scale (Hisli Şahin and Durak, 1995) is a 4-point Likert type scale derived from Ways of Coping Inventory of Folkman and Lazarus (1984). It consists of 30 items that aims to measure coping styles of university students. There are 28 positive and 2 negative items in this scale. Negative items

were reverse scored. This scale has grouped into five subscales: Self-confident coping style scale, optimistic coping style scale, submissive coping style scale, helpless coping style scale and seeking of social support scale. Internal consistency with the Cronbach alpha coefficient for optimistic coping style subscale ranged from .49 to .68; for self-confident coping style subscale ranged from .62 to .80; for helpless coping style subscale ranged from .64 to .73; for submissive coping style subscale ranged from .47 to .72 and for seeking social support subscale ranged from .47 to .45. In the current sample Cronbach alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from .64 to .80.

Big Five Personality Inventory Short Form (NEO FFI): This scale was developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) and adapted to Turkish culture by Gülgöz (2002). It consists of 60 items grouped into five subscales: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience and Conscientiousness. Each subscale has 12 items. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert type scale anchored by “fully false=1” and “fully true=5”. Subscales have been shown to have internal consistency with the Cronbach alpha’s ranged from and .55 to .83 (Ekşi, 2004).

2.3. Procedure

All study measures were administered to all 251 undergraduate students in Counseling and Guidance Department. They completed questionnaires approximately in 30 minutes during a class session. Questionnaire packet contained personal information form followed by Subjective Well-Being Scale (SWBS), Coping Style Scale (CSS) and Big Five Personality Inventory Short Form (NEO-FFI). After the students had completed the questionnaires, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to analyze the data obtained from the students.

3. Results

In order to determine the effects of big five personality traits and coping styles on subjective well-being, hierarchical regression analysis was performed using SPSS. With subjective well-being as the dependent variable, big five personality traits were entered in the first step and coping styles were entered in the second step. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Subjective Well-Being

Model	Variable	B	Standard Error B	β	t	p
1	Constant	120.691	11.256		10.722	.001
	Neuroticism	-.823	.104	-.357	-7.946	.001
	Extraversion	1.050	.108	.467	9.692	.001
	Agreeableness	-.064	.110	-.026	-.583	.560
	Conscientiousness	.725	.126	.263	5.766	.001
	Openness to experience	.224	.122	.087	1.841	.067
2	Constant	102.129	9.934		10.281	.001
	Neuroticism	-.166	.109	-.072	-1.518	.130
	Extraversion	.718	.100	.319	7.170	.000
	Agreeableness	-.029	.091	-.012	-.316	.752
	Conscientiousness	.346	.108	.126	3.199	.002
	Openness to experience	.015	.103	.006	.148	.882
	Self-confident	2.179	.382	.316	5.704	.001
	Optimistic	.590	.477	.069	1.238	.217
Helpless	-1.612	.284	-.289	-5.684	.001	

$R^2 = .53$ for Model 1; $R^2 = .70$ for Model 2

The results revealed that, big five personality traits were found to account for 53% of the variance in subjective well-being whereas big five personality traits and coping styles together explained 70% of the variance in subjective well-being. So, coping styles were found to account for 17% additional variance in this outcome.

As seen in Table 1, in the first model, extraversion ($\beta = .47$ $t(245) = 9.69$, $p < .001$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = .26$ $t(245) = 5.77$, $p < .001$) were positive predictors of subjective well-being whereas neuroticism ($\beta = -.36$, $t(245) = -7.95$, $p < .001$) was a negative predictor of subjective well-being. On the other hand, agreeableness and openness to experience did not add significantly to the model. In the second model, it was found that self-confident coping style was a positive predictor of subjective well-being ($\beta = .32$ $t(250) = 5.70$, $p < .001$) whereas helpless coping style was a negative predictor of subjective well-being ($\beta = -.29$ $t(250) = -5.68$, $p < .001$). The other coping styles which were optimistic, submissive and seeking social support did not significantly predict subjective well-being.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The study examined the predictive power of big five personality traits and coping styles on subjective well-being and provided two important results. First, personality traits significantly affected subjective well-being. Specifically, neuroticism influence subjective well-being in a negative way meaning that neurotic individual will likely have a low level on subjective well-being. On the other hand extraverted and conscientiousness individuals express a high level subjective well-being. These suggest that personality traits are an important determinant of subjective well-being. These findings are consistent with the previous studies (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998; Hayes and Joseph, 2003; Steve, Schmidt and Shultz, 2008) addressing top-down component of subjective well-being. According to the top-down theory (Diener, 1984; Lyubomirsky and Dickerhoof, 2010), SWB is the product of biological or temperamental factors directing behaviors, cognitions and attitudes rather than external factors (i.e. objective life circumstances). This provides a positive input into our everyday perception of the world, and it thus results a happy life.

Second, self-confident and helpless coping styles appeared to have an effect on subjective well-being. While self-confidence increases subjective well-being; helplessness decreases subjective well-being. The positive effect of self-confidence on subjective well-being was also indicated by Lazarus (1999). In addition, this result of the present study is parallel with the research of Clement and Nilson Schonnesson (1998) in that self-confident coping skills endorse psychological well-being. This means that a self-confident-coping-skilled individual believes himself and knows his abilities. This results controlling and regulating emotions and behaviors (Compas et al, 2001; Compton, 2005).

In conclusion, this study showed the relationships among personality traits, coping styles and subjective well being in a Turkish sample. The findings can serve the subjective well being literature in terms of cultural perspectives. Data may provide an application and implication to individual or group treatment in psychological counselling.

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