

Mental Control: How do Adolescents Protect Their Subjective Well-being?

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ABSTRACT

Mental control: how do adolescents protect their subjective well-being?

Purpose: This study is aimed to investigate how adolescents protect their subjective well-being by means of mental control.

Method: The preliminary study included a total of 233 adolescents [121 male (51.9%) and 112 female (48.1)], 14 to 17 years of age. The main study group included a total of 90 adolescents (45 male and 45 female). The data of the study were obtained using the Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being Increasing Scale. The data were analyzed with content analysis on the sentence basis.

Results: The findings indicated that adolescents had mental control by putting distance for negative persons, incidences and situations, being in control in their relationships, thinking optimistically, having positive time orientations, wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors, solving problems and seeking refuge in religious beliefs.

Discussion and Conclusions: The findings of the study suggest adolescents use seven different tools for mental control. Results of this study may be used for improving subjective well being program

Key words: Adolescent, subjective well-being, mental control

ÖZET

Mental kontrol: Ergenler öznel iyi oluşlarını nasıl korurlar?

Amaç: Bu çalışmada ergenlerin, mental kontrol aracılığıyla öznel iyi oluşlarını nasıl koruduklarının incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Ön çalışma grubuna, Ankara'da lise öğrenimi gören, 14-17 yaşları arasındaki 112'si kız (%48.1), 121'i erkek (%51.9), toplam 233 ergen katılmıştır. Asıl çalışma grubunda ise, 45'i erkek (%50) ve 45'i kız (%50), toplam 90 ergen yer almıştır. Çalışmada, Ergenler İçin Öznel İyi Oluşu Artırma Stratejileri Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde, cümle bazında içerik analizi tekniği kullanılmıştır.

Bulgular: Çalışmada, ergenlerin olumsuz olay ve durumlara karşı mesafe koyma, kontrollü ilişki kurma, iyimser düşünme, olumlu zaman yöneliminde bulunma, doğrudan mutluluğa yönelik davranışlar sergilemeyi isteme, sorunları çözme ve dini inanca sığınma aracılığıyla mental kontrol yaptıkları sonucuna varılmıştır.

Sonuç ve Tartışma: Bu çalışmada, ergenlerin yedi farklı araçla mental kontrolü gerçekleştirdikleri bulunmuştur. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, öznel iyi oluşu artırma programlarında kullanılabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ergen, öznel iyi oluş, mental kontrol

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INTRODUCTION

Happiness is a concept discussed in many fields. Happiness is expressed with concept of subjective well-being in psychology. Subjective well-being means people's living positive emotions frequently and living negative emotions too few and having high level of satisfaction from their lives (1,2). And strategies which are used so that people live negative emotions less and positive emotions more and have high level of satisfaction from their lives are called as subjective well-being increasing strategies.

Although history of studies about how individuals increase their subjective well-being levels in psychology is

new, there are theoretical and empirical explanations in this subject. For example, according to adaptation theory, adaptation is the most important characteristic of humans (3). Situations and events experienced by people may create low or high level subjective well-being for individuals. But in time, created effects begin losing their power (4). As individuals adapt to positive or negative conditions, their subjective well-being state at high level and subjective well-being state at low level do not last long (5). Another subjective well-being concept is the theory of fixed point: According to this theory, each individual's subjective well-being has a fixed level (6). According to fixed point theory, although individuals' subjective well-being levels are influenced by various life events, in time

they return to their fixed points (7). According to purpose theory, there are two important factors that affect subjective well-being of individuals. First one of these factors is, individuals determine targets for themselves and realize them; secondly individuals satisfy their needs (8-10). Another theory is the theory of evolution. According to theory of evolution, the gap between modern age and primitive age disrupted individuals' adaptation to life and affected their subjective well-being levels (11). In the event of closing the gap created between modern and primitive ages, people's advancing their friendships with relatives and satisfying their desires; their subjective well-being levels are increased.

In addition to theoretical explanations related with increasing subjective well-being, also findings of empirical studies are important. In this scope studies of Fordyce (12,13) among the studies realized in historical period has the title of being the first. Fordyce realized an experimental study with three stages. At the third stage of the study it was concluded that strategies such as positive thinking, being interested in new activities by having an active life, being interested with social activities and trying to be an outgoing individual are important and efficient strategies to increase subjective well-being levels of individuals. Another example for empirical studies is the study of Tkach and Lyubomirsky (14). According to writers; strategies such as transferring their purposes to life, carrying out religious activities, exhibiting direct subjective well-being oriented behaviors are strategies of individuals to increase their subjective well-beings. Eryilmaz (15) determined strategies used by adolescents to increase their subjective well-being as giving positive reaction to environment, getting positive reaction from environment, fulfilling the necessities of religious beliefs, mental control and satisfying the desires.

In literature, strategies of individuals to protect their subjective well-being are called as mental control (14,15). At this point, some subjective well-being increasing strategies discussed in literature are evaluated in scope of mental control indirectly. For example according to theory of evolution, strategies such as individuals' trying to reduce their stress and turning their competitor characteristic into cooperation are mental control strategies (11). From angle of empirical studies, Fordyce's

(12,13) strategy to reduce negative thoughts has purpose of mental control. In addition to these, mental control strategy takes part in two studies, as oriented towards protection of subjective well-being of individuals. First one of these studies belongs to Tkach and Lyubomirsky (14), while second one belongs to Eryilmaz (15). In both studies a scale is developed that can measure individuals' protection of their subjective well-being, in other words their having mental control. One of the scale dimensions is named as mental control.

To protect subjective well-being from the angle of adolescents, firstly it is necessary to find out negative events and situations that affect their subjective well-being levels. This necessity is pointed out by the adaptation theory and fixed point theory that were mentioned earlier in this study (5,6). These theories, eventually, present information and findings about how individuals shape their subjective well-beings. Literature contains no explanation about which dynamics are used by individuals in which way while they return to fixed point level or try to adapt; in other words how they adapt themselves and how they return to fixed point levels. In this scope, it may be a useful contribution to literature to explain how adolescents carry out mental control.

When literature is examined, it is stated that subjective well-being was a factor representing positive side of individuals' mental health (16). According to Vaillant (17) mental wellness is; maturity, an individual's adaptation to life and feeling subjectively good. Today subjective well-being is taken as a significant criterion to observe, evaluate and treat mental health of individuals (18). It is very important for individuals to be happy and protect their happiness in order to maintain their life in a healthy manner. Although many factors that affect subjective well-being of adolescents are put forward such as focus of control and self-respect (19), peer relationships (20), personality characteristics (21), somatic diseases (22,23), family structure (24-26), school satisfaction (27), intellect (28) and academic success (29); literature do not contain enough information about how adolescents protect their subjective well-being, in other words how do they carry out mental control. Information obtained in this subject can be used to help adolescents show healthy

development, for their treatment and to protect adolescents from diseases. Consequently in this study, the purpose is to examine how adolescents protect their subjective well-beings.

METHOD

This study has been carried out with quantitative and qualitative study method. Data is obtained from individuals at different ages and cross-sectional study design is used. Purpose of this study is to examine how do adolescents protect their subjective well-being via mental control.

Data in this study was collected as individual application. Ethic rules were followed while obtaining the data and volunteering principle was taken as basis. Before the application of data collecting tools, summarized information is provided about purpose of study. Then scales were given to participants, who want to take part in study. Also, additional explanations are made to participants when necessary.

Study Group

This study has two sub study groups: prestudy group and main study group. Existence reason of two sub study groups in study is being able to reach adolescents who use subjective well-being protection strategies good. Because, according to main idea, information obtained from adolescents who use strategies more efficiently will serve study's purpose better.

Prestudy Group: This study includes a total of 233 adolescents who are students of high schools in Ankara during 2010-2011 Education Year [121 male (51.9%) and 112 female (48.1)], 14 to 17 years of age. Eryilmaz (30) carried out a study with various purposes and variables on this study group. Using the same study group for this study aims at reaching individuals using subjective well-being increase strategies at high level, in addition to principle of scientific study's being economic.

Main Study Group: In study, among a group of 233 people for whom subjective well-being increasing scale was used, 129 adolescents who got more points than scale's mental control dimension average point

(Average = 9.56) were selected. To meet parametric conditions, a total of 90 adolescents were selected randomly among this 129 adolescents, 30 each (15 female, 15 male) from 14, 15 and 16 age groups. Qualitative study was carried out on selected adolescents.

Measurement Instruments Used in Study

Personal Information Form, Qualitative Question Form and Subjective Well-Being Increasing Scale for Adolescents is used in the study. Information about used measurement instruments are below.

Personal Information Form: To be able to determine demographic properties of participants in the study, a personal information form that includes variables such as age, sex, education and socio-economic level is used. This form also questions whether individuals had diagnostic because of a psychiatric disease and had treatment or not.

Subjective Well-Being Increasing Scale for Adolescents: Subjective Well-Being Increasing Scale for Adolescents has been developed by Eryilmaz (15). Declared variance of scale is 59%. Scale has five dimensions. Cronbach alpha reliability of whole scale and sub dimensions were found as 0.91 for dimension of Getting Positive Reaction from Environment, 0.92 for dimension of Fulfilling the Necessity of Religious Beliefs, 0.90 for dimension of Giving Positive Reactions to Environment, 0.68 for Satisfying Desires dimension, 0.71 for dimension to Protect Subjective Well-Being, and 0.89 for whole scale. To test scale's compliance validity, Life Satisfaction Scale was used. As the result of realized analysis, it was concluded that scale has the necessary validity and reliability values at sufficient levels. To get high points from the scale means using strategies at high level.

Statistical Analysis

This study was carried out with descriptive survey model. SPSS 15.0 package programme was used to analyze data in the study. Moving from the idea that studying on data obtained from prestudy group could be useful for evaluation of findings, purpose was examining relationships between subjective well-being increasing

Table 1: Correlation analysis results

		1	2	3	4	5
1.Mental control	r	1	0.59**	0.49**	0.24**	0.25**
2.Giving positive reaction to environment	r		1	0.58**	0.37**	0.22**
3.Getting positive reaction from environment	r			1	0.27**	0.33**
4.Fulfilling necessities of religious beliefs	r				1	0.12
5.Satisfying the desires	r					1

**p<0.01

strategies by Pearson correlation analysis technique. Open-ended question of “How do you protect your happiness” is asked to adolescents at main study group. Content analysis based on sentence method was applied on the answers given for that question. In the study, information and findings from theoretical and empirical studies related with subjective well-being are used to categorize findings obtained while analyzing the data (12-15). Statistical significance level is accepted as $p<0.05$.

RESULTS

Study’s findings are examined under two titles. First of these titles is the findings related with correlation analysis results and second one is the findings based on qualitative data analysis.

a) Findings related with Correlation Analysis Results

Data was analyzed with Pearson correlation method on data obtained from prestudy group, in order to examine relationship of mental control strategy with other strategies. Results are shown on Table 1.

It is noticed by examining Table 1 that, mental control strategy is related with giving positive reaction to environment ($r=0.59$, $p<0.01$) and getting positive reaction from environment ($r=0.49$, $p<0.01$) strategies in middle level and positive direction; and related with fulfilling the necessities of religious beliefs ($r=0.24$, $p<0.01$) and satisfying the desire ($r=0.25$, $p<0.01$) strategies in low level and positive direction.

b) Findings Related with Qualitative Analysis Results

Content analysis based on sentence method is used in the study for open-ended question of “How do you

protect your happiness” in the study. 94 sentences at 7 dimensions in total are obtained as the result of application. At the first dimension obtained by the analysis, “What makes me sad has no use. Therefore there is no reason to stay at a place making me sad” and such statements took place. In parallel with literature knowledge (13), first dimension is named as , “Putting distance for negative persons, incidences and situations”. In the second dimension, “I try to get along with environment where I am happy. I need them to preserve happiness” and such statements took place. Second dimension in accordance with sentence contents are named as “Being in control in their relationships”. In the third dimension, there were statements like “I have no reason to think about bad things. I think it does not always have to be the worst”. According to literature knowledge (12), third dimension is named as “thinking positively”. In the fourth dimension, “What is done, is done. Bothering my head about past will prevent me from living my future and current time” statements took place. In accordance with sentence contents, fourth dimension is named as “Having positive time orientations”. In the fifth dimension, there were statements like “I look around to see what is there for entertainment, I realize the things I find.”. In accordance with literature knowledge (14) the fifth dimension is named as “Wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors”. In the sixth dimension, there were expressions such as “I try to solve problems that make me sad”. Sixth dimension in accordance with sentence contents are named as “Solving problems”. In the seventh dimension, expressions like “I pray to be protected against accidents” took place. In accordance with literature knowledge (15) the seventh dimension is named as “Seeking refuge in religious beliefs”. Number of sentences, percentages and example sentences related with content analysis results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Content analysis results

Category	Example Sentences	Number	Percentage
Putting distance for negative persons, incidences and situations	I pay attention to other events and things to prevent thinking about negative events. For example computer. What makes me sad has no use. Therefore there is no reason to stay at a place making me sad.	31	33.3%
Being in control in their relationships	I try to get along with environment where I am happy. I need them to preserve happiness. When negative events occur, I try to talk without hurting and without making bad criticism.	25	26.9%
Thinking positively	I try to make myself happy by seeing positive aspects of negative events. I have no reason to think about bad things. I think it does not always have to be the worst.	17	18.3%
Having positive time orientations	It is pointless to think about problems I can't solve. Thinking about them at a wider time period will help finding realist and right solutions. What is done, is done. Bothering my head about past will prevent me from living my future and current time.	9	9.7%
Wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors	I prefer being happy instead of unhappiness when something bad happens. I look around to see what is there for entertainment, I realize the things I find.	4	4.3%
Solving problems	I try to solve the coldness created by discussion by talking. I try to solve problems that make me sad.	4	4.3%
Seeking refuge in religious beliefs	I pray to be protected against accidents. I thank God for my conditions.	3	3.2%

DISCUSSION

This study examines how adolescents protect their subjective well-being, in other words, how they carry out mental control. According to results, adolescents carry out mental control by keeping distance to negative events and situations, being in control in their relationships, positive thinking, positive time orientation, wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors, solving problems and seeking refuge in religious beliefs.

First dimension in this study is named as putting distance for negative people, events and situations; while sixth dimension is named as solving the problems. Such a naming is based on both literature knowledge (11-13) and obtained sentence contents. According to Buss (11), individuals must reduce the subjective stress they live to increase their subjective well-being and for mental control. From a different looking angle, according to literature when individuals live any kind of stress, they evaluate the situation and apply an emotion and

problem oriented coping method (31). While putting distance is one of the emotion-oriented coping strategies; planned problem solving strategy is under title of problem oriented coping strategies (32). Individuals put distance to situations, events and people who create stress and solve their problems. According to Lazarus and Folkman (31), using strategies such as planned problem solving and putting distance has short-term and long-term positive effects on individuals' subjective well-beings. In this study it was concluded that adolescents give reactions to carry out mental control (putting distance to negative people, situations and events and planned problem solving), like in the stress situation. Also this study's findings empirically support theoretically expressed ideas of Buss (11) who put forward important subjective well-being strategies.

Second dimension used for mental control is named as being in control in their relationships, in the study. Such a naming is based on both literature knowledge and obtained sentence contents (12,13). Getting in contact with environment is one of the strategies to

increase subjective well-being (11-15). In literature, Buss, (11), Fordyce, (12,13), Tkach and Lyubomirsky (14) unilaterally put forward individuals' strategy to get in contact with environment to increase their subjective well-being. Eryilmaz (15) discovered that getting in contact with environment has two dimensions for adolescents, which are getting positive reaction from environment and giving positive reaction to environment. In this study, at dimension of being in control in their relationships, the adolescents carried out mental control by tending to communicate with people which can support them, while interacting with people who can give negative reactions to them in a controlled manner. According to results of this study, adolescents carry out mental control by being supported by environment and giving support to environment like giving positive reaction to environment and getting positive reaction from environment. At this point, correlation analysis results in study (relationships between mental control and giving positive reaction to environment and getting positive reaction from environment, at positive direction and middle level) and results of qualitative data both support Eryilmaz's (15) two-dimensional approach.

Third dimension used for mental control is named as thinking positively, in the study. Such a naming is based on both literature knowledge (33) and obtained sentence contents. There are study findings in literature showing that optimistic adolescents have more friends, they cope with stressful situations better, they adapt to their new school in a shorter time and are happier according to their expressions (33,34). According to Lyubomirsky and friends (35) and Fordyce (12,13) who put forward subjective well-being increase strategies, individuals carry out mental control by being optimistic. Findings of this study support literature at this point.

Fourth dimension in the study used to carry out mental control is named as having positive time orientations. Such a naming is based on both literature knowledge (36) and obtained sentence contents. In literature there are studies showing that people's time orientations have important effects on individuals' subjective well-being (36,37). Studies show that individuals who have positive perspective for the past

and hedonist perspective for the present time have higher subjective well-being level when compared with other individuals (7,37). This study resembles the literature from angle of putting forward effects of time orientation for individual's subjective well-being while it is different from the literature as it puts forward the importance of having positive time orientation especially for mental control.

The fifth dimension used in the study to carry out mental control is named as wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors and seventh dimension is named as seeking refuge in religious beliefs. Such a naming is based on both literature knowledge and obtained sentence contents (35). According to Lyubomirsky and friends (35) who put forward the strategies of increasing subjective well-being, individuals increase their subjective well-being by subjective well-being oriented behaviors and fulfilling the necessities of religious beliefs. Findings of this study suggest that strategies which are efficient in increasing individuals' subjective well-being can be related with each other at different structures and different levels. Correlational relationship in the study between mental control and fulfilling the necessities of religious beliefs strategies support this finding.

CONCLUSIONS

Keeping distance to negative events and situations, being in control in their relationships, positive thinking, having positive time orientation, wishing to exhibit happiness oriented behaviors, solving problems and seeking refuge in religious beliefs seems to be important for protection of subjective well-being levels of adolescents having high school education, in other words for their mental control.

Some suggestions can be developed by moving from study findings. First of all, professionals who provide psychological aid can benefit from this study's findings. Taking these dimensions into account, they can prepare programmes that protect subjective well-being levels of their clients. In the studies carried out in positive psychology field, importance of both mental and physical health is expressed for strategies to increase subjective well-being (38,39). In the following studies,

discussing psychiatric patients and relationships between their healing process and mental control methods can contribute to literature from the angle of clinical applications and theory. When study findings are considered, it is seen that strategies of increasing subjective well-being and optimism inclination and coping strategies can be related with mental control strategy. Realization of studies in the future that put forward the relationships between these variables can contribute to literature.

This study was carried out on adolescents who were having high school education without any psychiatric

diagnosis, which consist the most important limitedness of this study. In the future studies, examination of mental control realization methods of adolescents having/not having high school education, having/not having psychiatric diagnosis by comparing them, can make additional contributions to literature. Also new studies will be possible by including variables such as academic success and socio-economic levels. In addition to all of these, this study has qualitative characteristic and descriptive content. Meaningful relationships between the variables can be studied in the future with quantitative study methods.

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