

Predictive Effect of Meaning of Life on Psychological Well-Being and Happiness Among University Students

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Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to examine the predictive effect of the meaning in life on psychological well-being and happiness in university students. In the study, it was also investigated whether there was a significant difference between the meaning in life, psychological well-being and happiness scores in terms of gender. The study population of the research consists of students studying at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University Faculty of Education in the fall semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. The study group consisted of a total of 323 students, 236 (73.1%) girls and 87 (26.9%) boys, aged between 20 and 26 ($x = 21.62$), selected with the convenience sampling method, one of the non-random sampling methods. In the study personal information form, Short form of Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, Psychological Well-Being Scale and Meaning in Life Questionnaire were used as data collection tools. According to the findings obtained from the study, the meaning in life predicted students' psychological well-being at a significant level; it was seen that the meaning in life explained about 30% of the total variance in students' psychological well-being scores. In addition, the meaning in life predicted the happiness level of students at a significant level; it was seen that the meaning in life explained about 23% of the total variance in the happiness scores of the students in a meaningful way. Finally, it was found that there was no significant difference between the meaning in life, happiness and psychological well-being scores of the students according to their gender.

Keywords: Meaning in Life, Psychological Well-Being, Happiness, Undergraduate, Regression

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Introduction

Psychology research until the 1970s had focused more on psychopathology or maladaptive behaviors, while in the 1970s, psychology started to make its way into the field of positive psychology, which is an approach that seeks to explain the positive characteristics of individuals, rather than concentrating on psychopathology-oriented studies. Positive psychology prioritizes that individuals should be strong, adaptable, and have positive psychological characteristics, and suggests that humans, just like seeds, green, bear fruits and reveals their potential when they find suitable conditions (Eryılmaz, 2014). Rather than focusing on problems and negativity in life, positive psychology deals with many concepts that help improve individuals and societies, such as happiness, well-being, determination, psychological resilience, and flow. Positive psychology interventions aim to distance psychology from the in-depth study of psychopathology and explore what makes people happier (Hefferon and Boniwell, 2014). To that end, positive psychology studies many different structural issues in individuals and seeks to examine their strong points instead of negative aspects.

It is notable that one of the topics often studied in research in the field of positive psychology is psychological well-being, which is considered as a dimension of the concept of well-being. Etymologically, it can be associated with concepts such as 'self-actualization, maturity or full functionality' (Manzano-García and Ayala, 2017). The concept of psychological well-being emphasizes on maximizing the existing capacities of individuals and achieving full functionality (Ryff and Singer, 2008). In other words, this concept includes positive self-perception, self-awareness on one's strengths and weaknesses in a realistic way, a healthy autonomy and finding meaning in life (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Another definition proposed by Huppert (2009) considers psychological well-being as feeling good about oneself and showing an effective functionality. In this context, psychological well-being entails individuals to find meaning in their life and to apply it into their subjective positive experiences.

Keyes et al. (2002) defined psychological well-being as engagement with the existential challenges in life (such as pursuing meaningful goals, personal growth, and building quality relations with others). In this regard, Ryff (1989b) stated that psychological well-being should be examined in 6 sub-dimensions as positive relations with others, autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life and environmental mastery. Differently from other theories on psychological well-being, Diener et al. (2010) argued that psychological well-being should be assessed from a socio-psychological perspective including components such as having supportive and rewarding relationships, contributing to the happiness of others, and being respected by others. The relevant literature on psychological well-being presents many studies supporting this view. Psychological well-being is positively linked to self-esteem (Schimmack and Diener, 2003, Gülyüksel Akdağ and Cihangir-Çankaya, 2016) self-knowledge (Demirci and Şar, 2017), social support and optimism

(Ferguson and Goodwin, 2010), social skills (Segrin and Taylor, 2007), mindful awareness (Deniz et al., 2017; Zümbül, 2019), benevolence and conformity (Telef et al., 2013) and life satisfaction (Kermen et al., 2016). It is clear that the concept of psychological well-being can be studied based on numerous variables in different areas.

The concept of happiness, on the other hand, has been, historically, one of the key research subjects. Modern psychology researchers also present wide range of opinions, statements and suggestions about happiness based on the work of ancient philosophers on happiness. To achieve psychological well-being, people have been constantly striving to find, understand happiness and to experience it. Happiness has been defined by many philosophers as the most important motivation behind human behaviors and the ultimate destination. People give various opinions about how to achieve happiness in life. However, although words such as joy, peace, excitement, and satisfaction are used to define happiness, these words fail to fully represent the concept of happiness (Marar, 2004). Happiness is also described as one's feeling confident and other positive emotions more intensely such as joy and hope and feel more positive emotions such as hope; and also, one's feeling negative emotions such as fear, anxiety (Baltacı, 2019), hopelessness, sadness, anger and hatred less intensely. Moreover, happiness refers to the achievement of a high level of satisfaction in areas that directly affect one's life, such as work, marriage, and health (Eryılmaz, 2011). These being said, it seems that happiness is not a concept with a single-function or only one-way effect; rather, it influences many areas in life and different concepts.

Happiness causes an individual to feel good as well as positively affects those around that individual, thus providing multiple benefits. Individuals with a high level of happiness, also enjoy a high level of motivation, and this leads to success. Brülde (2007) reported that happiness can be addressed through four types of classifications based on cognitive, hedonistic, mood and affective views. Among them, cognitive views argue that happiness is a mental activity through which individuals show a positive attitude to life. Işık (2013) studied happiness under the concept of hedonism and defined it as the satisfaction level that manifests itself in individuals in a balanced way, replacing unpleasant feelings. It is stated that happy individuals experience and react to events and circumstances in more positive ways (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Myers et al. (1995), on the other hand, associated happiness with three concepts as the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and satisfaction with life. Likewise, Diener et al. (2000) defined happiness as subjective well-being, and reported that happy people have a positive feeling, experience many joys, are satisfied with their life, have a high life energy, and engage in many activities. In summary, happiness is a concept intertwined with psychological well-being in literature. It can also be defined as a positive state of emotion, which includes the concepts of emotionally positive and cognitively life satisfaction.

The concept of the meaning of life is also significant in positive psychology research, considering its relationship with happiness. The meaning of life is a concept discussed by philosophers, theologians and scientists and artists to date. For this reason, it seems that the definitions of and views on the meaning of life are distinctive (Baş and Hamarta, 2015). Today, this concept is being studied within the field of positive psychology (Akin and Taş, 2015). Frankl has been a fundamental source of reference for research on the concept of the meaning of life. Frankl attributed the ability of an individual to survive under very difficult conditions to this concept and emphasized the human search for meaning as the key prerequisite for psychological health (Frankl, 2013). Frankl (2013) argued that people can discover the meaning of life in three different ways. These are: 1. by creating a work or doing a deed, 2. by experiencing something or encountering someone (love) and 3. by taking an attitude toward unavoidable suffering. Frankl (2013) highlighted that the meaning of life varies and that it can even change from person to person, from day to day, from hour to hour; thus, he argued that it is necessary to focus more on the subjective meaning of life at a certain moment. The search for meaning is a fundamental motivation in an individual's life, and an individual can find the meaning of life only through his/her own efforts. A person achieves satisfaction only when s/he reaches the meaning of his/her own life (Frankl, 2013).

The concepts of the meaning of life, happiness and psychological well-being are the subject of many studies that focus on positive and negative psychological aspects. Another variable studied in this regard is the variable of gender. There are different findings on whether the meaning of life, happiness and psychological well-being vary significantly by gender. Although there are studies that report the variable of gender varies significantly by happiness (Bal and Gülcan, 2014; Ünlü, 2019), certain research (Asıcı et al., 2015; Koydemir et al., 2015; Yang, 2008) indicated no significant difference. Similarly, some studies (Demirbaş et al., 2015; Siwek et al., 2017) concluded that gender yields significantly different results on the meaning of life. Furthermore, some findings (Baş and Hamarta, 2015; Brassai et al., 2011; Canatan et al., 2015; Cömert et al., 2016; Yüksel, 2012) reported no significant difference in regard to the meaning of life. There are also various research findings (Anlı, 2011; Cooper et al., 1995; Nilsson et al., 2010; Karabeyeser, 2013; Ryff, 1989b; Ryff and Keyes, 1995) on whether the concept of psychological well-being significantly varies by gender. The literature review on the relationship between the meaning of life and happiness (Bailey and Fernando., 2012; Braden et al., 2015; Cömert et al., 2016; Datu and Mateo, 2015; Doğan, Sapmaz, Tel, Sapmaz and Temizel, 2012; Dursun, 2012; Feldman and Snyder, 2005; Prager, 2009; Seyrek and Ersanlı, 2017; Steger and Kashdan., 2007; Steger et al., 2009; Ünlü, 2019; Wilchek-Aviad, 2015; Yıkılmaz and Demir Güdül., 2015) presents findings that there are significant relationships at different levels between these two. There are studies in the literature that yielded a significant relationship between the meaning of life and psychological well-being (Demirci and Şar, 2017; García-Alandete, 2014; Girgin, 2018; Göçen, 2019; Ryff, 1989b; Zika and Chamberlain, 1992).

The literature review shows that studies performed in Turkey and other countries on components such as psychological well-being, happiness, and the meaning of life together are limited. Since the individual is prepared to live at the professional and personal level during university, the meaning of life and psychological well-being processes are important in this period. Because the individual's level of well-being and understanding of life will help him to be welling in the coming years. Considering the importance of the concepts of happiness and psychological well-being in psychological health, it appears that scholarly attention to the relationship of these concepts with the meaning of life will help filling an important gap in the literature. That is, the research subject is original and distinctive. The main purpose of this study is to examine the predictive effect of the meaning of life on happiness and psychological well-being among university students. To that end, it first investigates the relationship between the meaning of life, and happiness and psychological well-being. Then, it probes into the predictive effect of the meaning of life on happiness and psychological well-being, respectively. It lastly determines whether there is a significant difference between the scores on the meaning of life, psychological well-being, and happiness by gender.

Methodology

Research Model

Based on the scores of the university students on the sub-scales of the Oxford Happiness Scale, Psychological Well-Being Scale and Meaning of Life Scale, this study examines the relationship between the meaning of life, happiness, and psychological well-being, and then explores differences between happiness, psychological well-being and happiness by the variable of gender. Thus, it draws on descriptive method.

Research Group

To select the sample for this research, this study benefits from convenience sampling, which is one of the non-random sampling methods. Consequently, this study is performed with a total of 323 students, including 236 (73.1%) female students and 87 (26.9%) male students, studying at different departments of the university at the undergraduate level. The age of the students ranged from 20 to 26 (x 21.62). 130 students (40.2%) were freshman-level students; 68 (21.1%) were sophomore; 70 (21.7%) were junior and 55 (17%) were senior.

Data Collection Tools

Oxford Happiness Scale-Short Form

The Oxford Happiness Scale Short Form (OHS-SF), proposed by Hills and Argyle (2002) to evaluate the happiness level of individuals, is an 8-item scale with a 5-point Likert type design. The minimum score on the scale is 8 points whereas the maximum score is 40. High scores indicate a high level of happiness among individuals. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Doğan et al. (2011). The

factor structure of the scale is very similar to the single-factor structure of the original scale. The Turkish version of the scale consists of 7 items, and the minimum score on the scale is 7 points whereas the maximum score is 35 points. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .74; the test-retest reliability coefficient is .85. This study calculated its internal consistency coefficient as .77.

Psychological Well-Being Scale

The Psychological Well-Being Scale was designed by Diener et al. (2009) in order to measure the existing well-being of individuals and to evaluate their well-being from a socio-psychological perspective. The Psychological Well-Being Scale consists of 8 items in a 7-point Likert type design. All the items in the scale are scored in a positive direction; there are no items scored in a negative direction. Accordingly, individuals can obtain a score ranging from 8 to 56 on the scale, and a high score on this scale indicates that the individual has rich psychological resources and strength (Diener et al., 2010). This scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Telef (2013), has a factor structure similar to its original version. The internal consistency coefficient of the Turkish version of this scale was reported as .80 in the reliability study. This study calculated its internal consistency coefficient as .85.

Meaning of Life Scale:

The Meaning of Life Scale was developed by Steger et al. (2006) to measure the meaning of life of individuals in two dimensions as the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life. The scale consists of 10 items, including 9 positive items and 1 negative item. Steger et al. (2006) found the internal consistency coefficient of the sub-scale of the presence of meaning in life as .82 and that of the sub-scale of the search for meaning in life as .87. The test-retest results on the scale indicated .70 for the presence of meaning in life and .73 for the searched meaning. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Demirdağ and Kalafat (2015). The Turkish version of the scale presents the same structure as its original version; the internal consistency reliability coefficient is .81 for the presence of meaning in life whereas it is .85 for the searched meaning. The test-retest performed on the scale found the internal consistency coefficient as .72 for the presence of meaning in life and .76 for the search for meaning in life. This study determined the internal consistency coefficient as .92 for the sub-scale of the presence of meaning in life and as .84 for the sub-scale of the search for meaning in life.

Implementation

The sample of this study consists of students who pursue their education at different departments of the university at the undergraduate level. The Approval of the Ethics Committee was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University in Social Sciences and Humanities, dated 03.05.2021 and numbered 14 for the conduct of this research. Also, the approval form explaining the purpose of this research and providing the

necessary information on the scales was presented to the students, and they were asked to check the relevant box if they agreed to participate in this research. Following that, the students who agreed to participate in this research were authorized to access the scales. In this way, data was collected from its participants in a virtual environment/digitally on a voluntary basis.

Data Analysis

The data of 347 students participating in the study were analyzed and missing and extreme values were identified in the measurement results of 24 students; thus, they were removed from the data set and this study was conducted with the resulting 323 data. The data showed a normal distribution; therefore, to analyze the data, this study conducted t-test to determine the relationship between the scores on the happiness, psychological well-being, and the meaning of life scales and gender; it further performed multiple regression analysis through SPSS 22 program to identify the predictive effect of meaning of life on happiness and psychological well-being.

Findings

This study has examined the relationships between the variables of the presence of and search for meaning in life and happiness. Table 1 presents the relationships between the variables, internal consistency coefficients and descriptive statistics related to these variables.

Table 1. Results of Relationships Between the Variables, Cronbach's Alpha Values and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Happiness	1			
2. Presence of meaning in life	.47***	1		
3. Search for meaning in life	-.142**	-.191***	1	
Average	22.195	24.755	23.669	
Standard Deviation	5.33	6.45	7.76	
Cronbach's Alpha	.77	.92	.84	

***p<.001 **p<.01

As seen in Table 1, which offers findings on the relationships between the variables, there is a significantly positive relationship ($p<.001$) between happiness and the presence of meaning in life ($r = .47$). This study further determined a negative correlation at .01 level between happiness and the search for meaning in life ($r = -.142$) and another negative correlation at .001 between the searched meaning and the presence of meaning in life ($r = -.191$).

This study also examined the relationships between the variables of the presence of and search for meaning in life and psychological well-being. Table 2 presents the relationships between the variables, internal consistency coefficients and descriptive statistics related to these variables.

Table 2. Results of Relationships Between the Variables, Cronbach's Alpha Values and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Psychological well-being	1			
2. Presence of meaning in life	.535***	1		
3. Search for meaning in life	-.003	-.191***	1	
Average	38.671	24.755	23.669	
Standard Deviation	8.565	6.45	7.76	
Cronbach's Alpha	.85	.92	.84	

***p<.001

Table 2 demonstrates that there is a significantly positive correlation ($p<.001$) between psychological well-being and the presence of meaning in life ($r = .54$). Moreover, a significantly negative correlation ($p<.001$) was found between the search for meaning in life and the presence of meaning in life ($r = -.191$).

This study performed multiple regression analysis to determine the explanatory effect of the presence of and search for meaning in life on psychological well-being; the results of this analysis are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Predictors of Psychological Well-Being

Variables	B	SE _B	β	t	p	R	R ²	F
Regression coefficient								
Presence of meaning in life	.735	.063	.554	11.594	.000	.54	.30	67.211*
The searched meaning	.113	.053	-.102	2.144	.003			

*p<.001

Table 3 demonstrates that the results of the regression analysis to identify the predictive effect of the presence of and search for meaning in life on psychological well-being indicated that the presence of and search for meaning in life together significantly explain approximately 30% of the total variance in the scores of the students on psychological well-being. A striking finding is that the variables of the presence of meaning in life ($t= 11.594$, $p<.001$) and the search for meaning in life ($t= 2.144$, $p<.01$) are significant predictive variables on psychological well-being.

This study further carried out multiple regression analysis to explore the explanatory effect of the variables of the presence of and search for meaning in life on happiness. Table 4 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 4. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Predictors of Happiness

Variables	B	SE _B	β	t	p	R	R ²	F
Regression coefficient								
Presence of meaning in life	.383	.041	.464	9.273	.000	.47	.23	47.174*
Search for meaning in life	-.037	.034	-.054	-1.07	.286			

*p<.001

Table 4 presented the results of the regression analysis performed to find out to what extent the presence of and search for meaning in life explain the variance in happiness and showed that the presence of and search for meaning in life together significantly explain approximately 23% of the variance in the scores of the students on happiness ($\Delta R^2 .23$ $p < .001$). This study revealed that the variable of the presence of meaning in life ($t = 9.273$, $p < .001$) is a significant predictive variable on happiness. However, the variable of the search for meaning in life ($t = -1.07$, $p > .05$) is not a significant predictive variable on happiness.

This study lastly examined the scores of the students on the Meaning of Life Scale, Oxford Happiness Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale by gender through the t-test. Table 5 presents the results of this analysis.

Table 5. T-test Results on The Scores of Students on The Meaning of Life Scale, Oxford Happiness Scale and Psychological Well-Being Scale by Gender

	Gender	N	x	S	sd	t	p
1. Presence of meaning in life	Female	236	24.907	6.061	321	.694	.488
	Male	87	24.345	7.435			
2. Search for meaning in life	Female	236	24.038	7.622	321	1.412	.159
	Male	87	22.667	8.075			
3. Happiness	Female	236	22.441	4.980	321	1.336	.173
	Male	87	21.529	6.164			
4. Psychological well-being	Female	236	39.081	8.347	321	1.415	.158
	Male	87	37.563	9.088			

Table 5 shows that the scores on the scales of the presence of meaning in life [$t(321) = -.694$, $p > .05$], and the search for meaning in life [$t(321) = 1.412$, $p > .05$], happiness [$t(321) = 1.336$, $p > .05$] and psychological well-being [$t(321) = 1.415$, $p > .05$] do not differ significantly by gender.

Discussion

This study seeks to investigate the predictive effect of the meaning of life on psychological well-being and happiness among university students. It further explores whether there is a significant difference between the scores obtained by the students in relation to meaning of life, psychological well-being, and happiness by gender.

An important finding of this study is that the meaning of life predicts the psychological well-being of students at a significant level. It is remarkable that about 30% of the total variance in the scores of the students on psychological well-being is significantly explained by the meaning of life. Ryff (1989a) used the concept of the meaning of life and the concept of the purpose of life interchangeably in her study where she developed a scale on psychological well-being. In this regard, she considered the meaning of life as an indicator of psychological well-being, as a positive personality trait. This argument of Ryff perhaps underlines the significantly positive relationship between the meaning of life and psychological well-being. In the relevant literature, there are research findings on the significantly positive correlation between psychological well-being and the meaning of life. Rathi and Rastgi (2007) concluded that the meaning of life and psychological well-being are correlated at a high level and that this means when one perceives his/her life as meaningful, s/he will feel better psychologically compared to those who do not perceive their life as meaningful. Kleftras and Psarra (2012) stated that the higher meaning of life is, the better the psychological well-being would be. Ivtzan et al. (2013) considered the meaning of life as well as self-actualization and personal growth as sub-dimensions of psychological well-being. Göçen (2019) conducted a study with pre-service teachers and revealed a significantly positive correlation between the presence of meaning in life and psychological well-being, which are among the sub-dimensions of the meaning of life but did not determine a significant correlation between the search for meaning in life and psychological well-being. The same study ascertained that the presence of meaning in life is a predictor of psychological well-being. Girgin (2018) performed a study to examine the relationship between psychological well-being and the meaning in life among university students and reported a significantly positive correlation between their psychological well-being and the meaning of life including the presence of and search for meaning in life. Likewise, Garcia-Alandete (2014) studied the relationship between the meaning of life and psychological well-being and indicated a significant positive relationship between these two. Their study also reported the meaning of life as an important and strong predictor of psychological well-being. Garcia-Alandete Martínez et al. (2018) expressed that the psychological well-being of individuals with a low level of meaning in life and a high level of meaning in life differed significantly. Krok (2015) stated that the meaning of life has an intermediary role between religious coping and psychological well-being. In another study, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) emphasized that the meaning of life has a stronger relationship with positively-evaluated psychological well-being rather than negative emotional states, and that there is thus a strong correlation between meaning in life and psychological well-being. Dezutter et al. (2013) examined the meaning of life under four different dimensions. Individuals were thus grouped in the following clusters: High Presence-Low Search, High Presence-High Search, Low Presence-Low Search, Low Presence-High Search. The results showed that the psychological well-being of the individuals in the High Presence and Low Search cluster and in the High Presence and High Search cluster is higher.

Another study argued that psychological well-being is positively related to optimism, happiness, and life satisfaction (Demirci and Şar, 2017). In a study that investigated the intermediary effect of the meaning of life on the relationship of psychological well-being by gender, a positive significant relationship between the present meaning and the searched meaning, and psychological well-being was found (Aytekin and Sakal, 2021). These findings support the results of this research.

When the first finding of the study are considered in terms of education policies; Some research confirms that the next stage of undergraduates' professional lives, psychological well-being and happiness levels, are important in terms of work efficiency and life satisfaction. In the descriptive study conducted by Arslan and Tura (2022), a significant relationship was found between teachers' life meaning levels and psychological well-being. Similarly, Göçen (2019) revealed that teachers' life meaning levels significantly predicted their psychological well-being. In a study conducted with teachers who did not start working unlike the teachers who worked, it was stated that the lifestyles of the teachers had a significant effect on their psychological well-being (Sezer, 2022). Granziera et al. (2023), which handled the effect of teachers' psychological well-being differently, stated that teachers' psychological well-being levels contributed to the academic success of students. Witnesseth, it can be said that the level of psychological well-being and positive emotions in business life have an important effect on both personal and work efficiency. Stating that the level of psychological well-being in business life can be gained with some skills during the university years, which is the previous stage, Smith et al. (2021), revealed that the psychoeducation program on the meaning of life for university students contributes to psychological well-being and positive emotions in their studies directly related to the result of this study. The first finding of our study, the predictive effect of the meaning of life and the level of psychological well-being on happiness, and the similar findings of other studies, reveal that it is important to develop educational policies on the meaning of life and psychological well-being at all levels of education.

A second finding of this study pointed out that the meaning of life significantly predicts the happiness level of the students; the meaning of life significantly explains about 23% of the total variance in the scores of the students on happiness. That is, there is a significant relationship between the meaning of life and happiness, and as the levels of the present meaning and the searched meaning increase, levels of happiness increase too. It is further remarkable that there is a relationship between happiness and the meaning of life, and that those who score high on the meaning of life also obtain high scores on happiness. (King and Napa, 1998). Similarly, previous research (Jonah Li et al., 2019; Bryan et al., 2020) yielded a decisively significant relationship between the meaning of life and happiness. A study was carried out by Bailey and Fernando (2012) to examine the effect of routine and project-based leisure time on happiness and the meaning of life. A total of 305 university students participated in this study. The structural equation modeling and regression analyses revealed that there

are significant relationships between the meaning of life, happiness, and routine recreation. Moreover, it is reported that social participation, personal opinions and time spent outside are strong predictors of happiness and meaning of life. Cavazos et al. (2014) stated that the meaning of life is a predictor of happiness. On the relationship between the meaning of life and subjective well-being, Doğan et al. (2012) found that these are positively correlated. Demir and Murat (2017) reported that the meaning of life as well as satisfaction and optimism are predictors of happiness. The study by Cömert et al. (2016) determined that the students who expressed that there is a meaning in their lives were more satisfied with their lives. It is further noted that this also highlights how strong the relationship between the meaning of life and happiness is, and that if the meaning of life decreases, people may experience depression, unhappiness or may even suicide. The literature also presents research findings that the meaning of life is a factor that protects individuals against negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide. Indeed, Braden et al. (2015) argued that the meaning of life significantly prevents depression and suicide. Further, Wilchek-Aviad (2015) noted that there is a negative correlation between the meaning of life and suicide. In another study conducted by Marco et al. (2017), it was found that the meaning of life has a preventive and protective role in unhappiness and suicide. Feldman and Snyder (2005) administered the scale of meaning in life, hope, depression, and anxiety to 139 university students. After performing a factor analysis, they concluded that hope is a component of meaning in life. Also, the regression analysis yielded that the concept of hope weakens the relationship between meaning in life and depression and meaning in life and anxiety. As for meaning in life, similar results are reported for the correlations between hope, depression, and anxiety. The study conducted by Seyrek and Ersanlı (2017) with university students, reported a significant relationship between the overall meaning of life and the sub-dimensions of the meaning of life, and the happiness levels of students. Yaran (2020) ascertained that there is a positive and significant correlation between the happiness levels of university students and the meaning in their lives. These above-mentioned findings support the findings of this study.

The final finding of this study is that there is no significant difference between the meaning in life, happiness, and psychological well-being among students by gender. Previous research also indicated that gender did not differ the meaning of life, happiness, and psychological well-being (Baş and Hamarta, 2015; Brassai et al., 2011; Canatan et al., 2015; Cömert et al., 2016; Yüksel, 2012; Saraç et al., 2018), which is congruent with this study. Another study performed with 278 university students on the relationship between their cognitive flexibility and happiness, concluded that gender did not differ their happiness (Asıcı and İkiz, 2015). On the contrary, some studies concluded that gender leads to a difference on the meaning of life (Demirbaş-Çelik, 2016; Siwek et al., 2017). Siwek et al. (2017) claimed that the meaning of life is different in women and men. Likewise, Demirbaş-Çelik (2016) reported that gender revealed a significant difference in the meaning of life and that the scores of women on the meaning of life were higher than that of men. Sotgiu (2016) revealed that the

happiness levels of men are higher than the levels of women. Similarly, Akin and Şentürk (2012) used the data of the European Quality of Life survey as secondary data to conduct a study in 2006 and found out that men were happier than women. Agbo and Ome (2017) explored concepts of happiness and its determinants among young adults with a sample of 125 university students and ascertained that men tend to be happier than women. Studies that compared the psychological well-being of individuals by gender (Gürel, 2009; Nilsson et al., 2010; Anlı, 2011; Karabeyeser, 2013; Topuz, 2013; Özden, 2014; Sandıkçı, 2014) showed that the psychological well-being levels of women were higher than that of men. On gender, Göçen (2019) ascertained that the variable of being male had a negative correlation with psychological well-being. Ryff (1995) concluded that the levels of positive relationships with others and personal growth, which are sub-dimensions of the psychological well-being, among women were significantly higher than the levels of men. However, some studies pointed out that there is no significant relationship between gender and psychological well-being (Aytekin and Sakal, 2021; Girgin, 2018). These differences in research on the variables of the meaning of life, happiness, and psychological well-being, which are investigated in this research, are due to some reasons. One of them is that women can express themselves more easily in social relations, build deeper and more sincere relationships, and their social support systems are more functional than that of men. Besides, cultural factors and culture-specific gender roles may also cause such difference.

The findings of this study overall indicated that the meaning of life significantly predicted the level of psychological well-being of students; that the meaning of life significantly explained about 30% of the total variance in the scores of the students on psychological well-being. It is further notable that the meaning of life significantly predicts the happiness level of the students; the meaning of life significantly explains about 23% of the total variance in the scores of the students on happiness. This study lastly found out that there is no significant difference between the meaning in life, happiness, and psychological well-being among students by gender. Based on the findings, this study can offer several suggestions. First, investigating the relationship between the same variables through a different sample would be a great contribution. Considering the predictive effect of the meaning of life variable examined in this study, future research may focus on the levels of the meaning of life among different individuals. That is, it may be useful to perform a similar study, but with different variables, to offer deeper insights into the variables related to the meaning of life and the potential intermediary roles. This study was conducted for undergraduates as it is a preparation process for university life in the university period. In addition, since individuals form their personality development during adolescence, studies can be carried out with these variables related to adolescence. This study has revealed that the meaning of life is effective. Therefore, experimental studies can be planned to develop skills related to the meaning of life for students. In addition, at the level of educational policies, psychoeducation programs on the meaning of life and psychological

well-being appropriate to age and development level at each level of education can be developed and integrated into guidance studies.

Policy Implications

When the findings of the study are considered in terms of education policies; Some research confirms that the next stage of undergraduates' professional lives, psychological well-being and happiness levels, are important in terms of work efficiency and life satisfaction. In the descriptive study conducted by Arslan and Tura (2022), a significant relationship was found between teachers' life meaning levels and psychological well-being. Similarly, Göçen (2019) revealed that teachers' life meaning levels significantly predicted their psychological well-being. In a study conducted with teachers who did not start working unlike the teachers who worked, it was stated that the lifestyles of the teachers had a significant effect on their psychological well-being (Sezer, 2022). Granziera et al. (2023), which handled the effect of teachers' psychological well-being differently, stated that teachers' psychological well-being levels contributed to the academic success of students. Witnesseth, it can be said that the level of psychological well-being and positive emotions in business life have an important effect on both personal and work efficiency. Stating that the level of psychological well-being in business life can be gained with some skills during the university years, which is the previous stage, Smith et al. (2021), revealed that the psychoeducation program on the meaning of life for university students contributes to psychological well-being and positive emotions in their studies directly related to the result of this study. The first finding of our study, the predictive effect of the meaning of life and the level of psychological well-being on happiness, and the similar findings of other studies, reveal that it is important to develop educational policies on the meaning of life and psychological well-being at all levels of education.

In addition, at the level of educational policies, psycho-education programs on the meaning of life and psychological well-being appropriate to age and development level at each level of education can be developed and integrated into guidance.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Author Credit Statement

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Ethical Statement

Ethical approval has been obtained from the Hatay Mustafa Kemal University ethics committee of scientific research with the decision numbered 14 on 03 May 2021.

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