

# Predictors of Subjective Well-Being: Interpersonal Sensitivity, Close Relationship Experiences and Academic Self-Concept

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## ABSTRACT

The emphasis on well-being in mental health definitions and the impact of positive psychology studies, it is observed that the interest in the factors explaining the subjective well-being (happiness) of individuals is increasing day by day. Subjective well-being involves cognitive and emotional evaluation of life. These evaluations may vary from one area of life to another and may have positive or negative effects on happiness. For this reason, numerous studies have focused on the relationship between subjective well-being and various aspects of life domains including friendship, romantic relationships, and academic achievement. However, it is noteworthy that the extent and priority of how the dynamics of various life domains collectively contribute to individuals' subjective well-being have not yet to be sufficiently clarified. From this point of view, the present study aimed to investigate the predictive role of the subcomponents of university students' interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-perception and attachment-based experiences in close relationship in their subjective well-being and to determine the priority status of these factors. The participants of the study consisted of 410 (235 female, 175 male) university students between the ages of 18-25. As a result of the correlation analysis, statistically significant relationships were found between all of the sub-dimensions of interpersonal sensitivity, academic self and experiences in close relationship and subjective well-being. The results of the stepwise regression analysis revealed four statistically significant models to explain subjective well-being. At each stage, when the effects of the sub-dimensions included in the previous model were controlled, the explanatory levels of the variables included in the model for subjective well-being were 30% for lack of social self-confidence, 12% for academic effort, 3% for interpersonal anxiety and dependency, and 4% for non-assertive behaviors, respectively. The findings were discussed and supported by the explanations and findings in the literature.

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**Keywords:** Subjective well-being, interpersonal sensitivity, experiences in close relationships, academic self-concept

## INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) has adopted an approach in 2001 and 2018 that views mental health not only as an illness or disability but also as an integral component of holistic health and overall well-being. Thus, the emphasis on psychological and subjective well-being has also gained importance. Although the foundations of this approach date back to the 1948s (WHO, 2010), it can be said that the focus on positive elements in human mental health gained momentum under the umbrella of positive psychology towards the end of the 1990s, especially with the influence of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's work (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As a matter of fact, the World Health Organization's (2004) report on promoting mental health highlights its emphasis on positive mental health. With these emphases, mental health is conceptualized as encompassing "positive emotions such as happiness, psychological resources (e.g., personality traits such as self-esteem and competence), and the capacity to cope with negative situations such as psychological resilience. The report focuses on how mental health can be strengthened and achieved, emphasizing that mental health in the emotional dimension can be conceptualized as a subjective state of well-being. Therefore, it is seen that subjective well-being stands out among the basic concepts of both positive psychology and mental health.

Subjective well-being is recognized as an important component of quality of life and reflects how an individual evaluates his/her life. This evaluation includes judgments about the whole life (life satisfaction) or a specific part of it (e.g. work, marriage, etc.), as well as evaluations of positive and negative emotional experiences (Diener & Suh, 1997; Kashdan, 2004). "Subjective well-being" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which is the scientific equivalent of the concept of "happiness" in folk language, reflects individuals' cognitive and emotional subjective evaluations of their experiences (Diener et al., 2002). The existence of subjective well-being can be mentioned when the emotional evaluation in question corresponds to the individual's experiencing positive emotions (e.g. pleasure, joy, hope) more than negative emotions (e.g. sadness, anxiety,

anger, stress), and when the cognitive evaluation corresponds to high satisfaction with life domains (work, family, social life, etc.) (Diener, 1984; Lyubomirsky, 2001). The presence of subjective well-being is an indicator of positive mental health. As a matter of fact, subjective well-being is accepted as an important predictor of both physical health and life expectancy (Ong, 2010; Howell et al., 2007; Kushlev et al., 2020) and mental health (Keyes, 2006; Bracke, 2001) in many studies. Therefore, the effect of life domains that can play a central role in mental health on the level of subjective well-being gains importance. These life domains can be evaluated as private life, including close relationships, social life, involving friendship relationships, and professional-academic life, encompassing any task-related experiences. As a matter of fact, family life, social life and work-professional life are among the areas of life that are typically reviewed in the examination of a person's mental state today. According to Adler (1954), the pioneer of Individual Psychology, people's main tasks in life include work (contributing to society), friendship (establishing social relations, friendship relations) and love (establishing close relationships such as marriage and family). A positive or negative trend in one of the life domains can have a similar effect on the other domains (Sapmaz, 2015). For this reason, when the common points of positive psychology and Adlerian theory (Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2016) are evaluated as a whole, it arouses scientific curiosity on how individuals' subjective evaluations of different life domains and tasks are reflected in their happiness levels. Although the relationships between the concepts related to each life domain and subjective well-being have been the subject of various studies, the extent and priority to which these life domains together explain subjective well-being has not yet been addressed. From this point of view, the levels of university students' interpersonal sensitivity for their social life, academic self for their perceptions of their professional life, and experiences in close relationships for their private life in terms of explaining their subjective well-being constituted the starting point of the study.

In this study, interpersonal sensitivity, which is considered as a part of the social-friendship life domain, is a broad concept that is recognized for its effects on social relationships. This concept has been defined in different ways in the literature, and the differences between the definitions draw attention to the aspects of interpersonal sensitivity that facilitate or hinder human relationships. For example, interpersonal sensitivity is defined as being overly aware and sensitive to the feelings and behaviors of others, which can lead to negative and erroneous interpretations of others' behaviors and thus can be detrimental to human relations (Boyce & Parker, 1989). According to Bernieri (2001), interpersonal sensitivity is defined as a concept that includes both making accurate perceptions about others and exhibiting appropriate interpersonal behavior, and with this definition, it can also serve as a facilitator of human relations. Despite the differences between the definitions, it is emphasized that high levels of interpersonal sensitivity lead to incorrect inferences and weaken relationships (Aydın & Hiçdurmaz, 2016). Among university students in emerging adulthood, interpersonal sensitivity is considered as an important predictor of communication skills (Erözkan, 2005). In addition, interpersonal sensitivity is closely related to social anxiety, which is one of the pathologies that limit individuals' communication with others (Gilboa-Schechtman et al., 2008; Harb et al., 2002). As a matter of fact, in a study in which subjective well-being training was given by Goldwurm et al. (2006), it was found that both interpersonal sensitivity and social anxiety were related to subjective well-being and that interpersonal sensitivity and social anxiety scores decreased as subjective well-being increased. Similarly, even minimal social interactions with unfamiliar people (greeting, thanking and wishing well, etc.) were found to be effective on subjective well-being (Günaydın et al., 2021). The acceptance of social relationships as one of the strongest and most important determinants of happiness (Myers, 2000) leads to the need to make the effects of variables such as interpersonal sensitivity, which inhibit and damage these relationships, on happiness more understandable.

Another life domain that is thought to be effective on subjective well-being is close and romantic relationships. Close relationship is a type of relationship that generally includes relationships between siblings, spouses and ex-spouses, children and their parents, people who live or have lived in a common house, or people who have a personal relationship with each other (Fagerlund et al., 2022, p. 40). However, it is seen that the more prominent attachment and relationship type in adult close relationships is romantic relationships (Arslan, 2020). In this context, close relationships are defined as a continuous relationship that includes feelings of emotional or sexual intimacy, trust and commitment (Levy & Joffe, 1978). The need for closeness and security in infancy and childhood and the attachment style (secure, insecure: anxious-avoidant or fearful) established with the mother or caregiver are reflected in adulthood and can positively or negatively affect adult close relationships (Wei et al., 2007). In this context, when the relationship established with the caregiver

in the early period is one of the insecure attachment styles, it negatively affects the relationship style established with the partner and affects the emotional states of the individuals and decreases their happiness levels. The results of Mikulincer and Shaver's (2005) study examining the role of attachment orientation in shaping the emotional reactions experienced in close relationships contain findings that clearly reveal this situation. In the research, it was found that individuals with secure attachment style exhibited different emotional patterns (happiness, admiration, gratitude, compassion, pride, anger, guilt, etc.) in the relationship, whereas individuals with insecure attachment style remained within a narrow framework and gave defensive and negative emotional reactions (hostility, blame, pity, pride, contempt, hostile jealousy, etc.) to their partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Because being in a romantic relationship with deep meaning is as important a determinant for happiness as being in a healthy relationship with others (Demir, 2010). As a matter of fact, a large number of studies have shown that healthy close relationships and relationship evaluation styles have a reciprocal relationship with happiness, psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Fok & Cheng, 2018; Forgas et al., 1994; Gere & Schimmack, 2013; Bucher et al., 2019; Czyżowska et al., 2020). For emerging adults between the ages of 18-25, who are in the transition period from adolescence to adulthood, the exploration of love involves emotional attachment at a deeper level, while also reflecting an identity-oriented search (what kind of relationship is suitable for them) (Arnett, 2000). In this context, it seems to be of particular importance to understand to what extent attachment-based close relationship experiences play a role in the subjective well-being of university students in emerging adulthood.

Finally, the life domain of work-professional context, which is believed to potentially influence subjective well-being, was examined. Furthermore, academic self-concept was explored by considering the fundamental responsibilities of university students. Academic self is considered as a self-component that reflects an individual's self-evaluations and perceptions (Bențea, 2010; Huang, 2011). When associated with student identity, the academic self is defined as a specific self-image that reflects relatively stable perceptions and thoughts about one's own competence (Fisher, 1973). Academic self-esteem, which is of central importance for students, reflects individuals' belief systems about what and how much they know about their academic abilities, their knowledge and achievements in a subject (Mandelman et al., 2010). Therefore, high academic self-esteem provides a facilitating effect in achieving the desired educational outcomes (Marsh & Martin, 2011).

On the other hand, a negative academic self-concept results in factors that make it difficult for students to adjust to school. These negative effects may include academic procrastination, school withdrawal, and low academic performance (Ghazvini, 2011; Huang, 2011). Furthermore, the negative construct of academic self-concept may also pose a risk for behavioral problems, such as encountering violence or peer bullying (Marsh et al., 2004; Hammig & Jozkowski, 2013). Therefore, positive academic self is considered a critical factor for mental health and serves as a protective function for anxiety, stress and burnout (Meyer et al., 2023). In positive psychology and happiness research, it is seen that there are studies focusing on academic achievement rather than the concept of academic self. When the studies on academic achievement and happiness are examined, it is stated that there is a reciprocal relationship between both variables and that students with low achievement levels also have low levels of happiness, while happiness levels increase in parallel with high achievement levels (Bucker et al., 2018). In fact, the main way to increase student happiness is to strengthen the school atmosphere and educators' attitudes that support the academic self (Noddings, 2003; Belfi et al., 2012; Robertson, 2013). Upadhyay (2021) draws attention to the development of positive psychology-based interventions in subjective well-being and academic self-concept and states that there is a need for further research on the applicability to increase positive emotions and reduce negative emotions. From this point of view, taking into account the positive relationship of high self-esteem with happiness (Baumeister et al. 2003), the aim of this study is to determine the role of the academic self, which is considered as a part of the self, in the happiness levels of university students.

Hypotheses: The research hypotheses formed in line with the relevant literature and the purpose of the research are as follows:

H1. The sub-dimensions of the interpersonal sensitivity (interpersonal worry and dependency, lack of social self-confidence and non-assertive behaviors) are significant predictors of subjective well-being in university students.

H2. The sub-dimensions of experiencing close relationships (avoidance and anxiety ) are significant predictors of subjective well-being in university students.

H3. The sub-dimensions of academic self-concept (academic effort and academic confidence) are significant predictors of subjective well-being in university students.

## METHOD

### *AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH*

The purpose of the present study is to examine the predictive role of the subcomponents of interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-concept, and attachment-based experiences in close relationships on their subjective well-being and to determine the priority status of these factors. This research is a descriptive study conducted using a relationship screening model to determine the extent and priority of interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-concept, and close relationship experiences in predicting university students' subjective well-being.

#### *Participants*

Convenience sampling was used to select the research group in this study. It is a sampling technique commonly used in social sciences in which researchers select participants who are available, suitable, and willing to volunteer for the study. The method allows for easy access and voluntary participation. The sample of the study consisted of 410 (235 female, 175 male) university students between the ages of 18-25 (Mean = 21.61, SD = 1.65.) studying in various departments across different universities.

#### *Data Collection Tool*

**Informed Consent and Demographic Information Form:** Firstly, the informed consent form was used to inform the participants about the purpose and content of the study. The participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time they wanted through the consent form. Demographic Information Form was used to determine the age and gender of the volunteer university students.

#### *Interpersonal Sensitivity Scale*

The scale was developed by Boyce and Parker (1989) to determine the level of interpersonal sensitivity and adapted to Turkish by Doğan and Sapmaz, S (2012). The scale, which has a 5-point rating type, consists of 30 items and 3 sub-dimensions. These dimensions are conceptualized as "interpersonal worry and dependency", "low social self-esteem" and "non-assertive behaviors". In the adaptation study, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), criterion-related validity and Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated. The goodness of fit indices and RMSEA values obtained by CFA showed that the five-factor structure in the original form was not confirmed. Then, as a result of the construct validity of the scale, a three-factor structure explaining 36.14% of the total variance was obtained. The reliability level of the scale was calculated by internal consistency method and Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .81 for the whole scale. Alpha reliability coefficients for the sub-dimensions were .84 for "interpersonal worry and dependency", .64 for "lack of social self-confidence", and .73 for "non-assertive behaviors". The alpha internal consistency coefficients obtained in the current study were .88 for the overall scale and .90, .76 and .72 for the sub-scales respectively.

#### *Matovu Academic Self-Concept Scale*

The Turkish adaptation study of the scale developed by Liu and Wang (2005) and then adapted by Matovu (2014) to measure university students' academic self-concept was conducted by Cantekin and Gökler (2019). For the psychometric investigations of the scale, Efa and Cfa were used for validity studies, and reliability studies were examined by calculating the alpha coefficient. At the end of Efa, it was determined that the two-factor structure with factor loadings ranging between .722 and .963 and explaining 76.63% of the total variance was confirmed with acceptable fit index values as a result of Cfa. The reliability coefficient of the adapted scale was .93 for the whole scale and .96 for both sub-dimensions (academic confidence, academic effort). The internal alpha internal consistency coefficients obtained in the current study were .87 for the overall scale and .80 and .77 for the subscales, respectively.

#### *Oxford Happiness Scale*

Turkish adaptation studies of the scale developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) to measure happiness were conducted by Doğan and Sapmaz, F (2012). In the adaptation study, EFA, CFA, criterion-related validity, Alpha, test split and composite reliability calculations were utilized for psychometric investigations of the scale. As a result of the EFA, a single-factor structure was obtained with factor loadings ranging between 0.32 and 0.77 and explaining 29.84% of the total variance. At the end of the fit index values obtained with CFA examinations, it was found that the structure obtained with EFA was confirmed. 4 different scales were used

in the criterion-related validity analyses and the correlation values obtained between the scales were found to be significant. As a result of the reliability analysis of the scale, the Alpha reliability coefficient was 0.91, the composite reliability coefficient was .91, and the test split reliability coefficient was 0.86. In the current study, the alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated for the overall scale was .92.

#### *The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale Short Form*

The Turkish adaptation of the scale developed by Wei et al. (2007) to determine the experiences in close relationships based on attachment was conducted by Savcı and Aysan (2016). The scale, which consists of 12 items on a 5-point scale, consists of two sub-dimensions, namely Close Relationship Experiences Anxiety and Avoidance. EFA, CFA, alpha coefficient and item discrimination index calculations were utilized in the psychometric analysis of the Turkish version of the scale. As a result of EFA, a two-factor structure was obtained with factor loadings ranging between .64 and .81 and explaining 72.1% of the total variance. The fit indices obtained as a result of the CFA findings showed that this two-factor structure was confirmed. The alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .94 for the whole scale and .90 for both anxiety and avoidance sub-dimensions. As a result of the item analysis, it was found that the corrected item-total correlation coefficients of the scale ranged between .65 and .81 and the items were at a discriminative level. The internal alpha internal consistency coefficients obtained in the current study were calculated as .61 and .63 for the sub-dimensions of the scale, respectively.

#### **DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

After the application permission with decision number 1131 taken by Izmir Bakırçay University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee, the data collection tools of the study were prepared in Google-Form online survey environment. Participants, whose identity information was not obtained on the basis of confidentiality, took part in the study on a voluntary basis. With informed consent, participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time they wanted.

The data were analyzed with SPSS 25 package program. The happiness levels of individuals were examined with the variables of experiences in close relationships, academic self-concept and interpersonal sensitivity, and stepwise regression analysis was performed to see the importance of each variable in explaining happiness. Before analyzing the data, the assumptions of multiple regression analysis were examined. Accordingly, Tolerance > 0.2 and VIF<10 values were obtained and it was determined that there was no multicollinearity between the variables. In addition, Cook's distance value was found to be maximum .06 and there was no leverage effect. With the Durbin-Watson coefficient (1.80) between 1.5 and 2.5, it was found that there was no autocorrelation and it was accepted that all assumptions for conducting regression analysis were met (Kalaycı, 2010). Before the regression analysis, the relationships between the variables were determined by Pearson Correlation Analysis.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In this study, the top headings belonging to different life domains, which are examined together to what extent and priority they explain subjective well-being, are limited to romantic relationships, academic life and social life. The relevant variables selected for each life domain are limited to interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-concept, and the components of the instruments designed to measure attachment-based close relationships.

Cognitive and emotional evaluations of different areas of life may vary with age. For this reason, the results of the data obtained for the variables selected within the scope of the research are for young adults between the ages of 18-25 who are currently studying at university.

Another limitation of the study is that while the participants' close relationship experiences were evaluated with all components (anxiety and avoidance), there was no information on whether the participants were currently or in the past in a romantic relationship. Considering the explanations in the existing literature that not being in a romantic relationship or having different attachment styles of partners in a relationship can affect each other (Amarachukwu, et al., 2021), not knowing whether the participants have partners or not increases the limitation in the assessment of attachment-based close relationship experiences.

In conclusion, the generalizability of the study is limited due to its focus on young adults aged between 18-25 and the limited scope of the measurement instruments in the areas of romantic relationships, academic life, and social life. Therefore, it is essential that confirmatory comparative studies be conducted in the future that examine similar life domains using a variety of measurement instruments.

## FINDINGS

A stepwise regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of experiences in close relationships, academic self-concept and interpersonal sensitivity variables on happiness scores. Before the analysis, the relationship between the variables was examined with Pearson Correlation coefficient and it was found that all variables had a statistically significant relationship with happiness scores. According to the correlation values obtained and the direction of the values, it was found that happiness scores were negatively correlated with low social self-esteem ( $r = -.553, p < .001$ ), interpersonal worry and dependency ( $r = -.450, p < .001$ ) sub-dimensions of the Interpersonal Sensitivity Scale; anxiety ( $r = -.231, p < .001$ ) and avoidance ( $r = -.127, p < .01$ ) sub-dimensions of the Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships. On the other hand, happiness scores showed a positive linear relationship with the academic effort ( $r = .493, p < .001$ ) and academic confidence ( $r = .445, p < .001$ ) sub-dimensions of the academic self-concept and the non-assertive behaviors ( $r = .090, p < .05$ ) sub-dimension of the interpersonal sensitivity scale. All correlation coefficients of the analysis are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation Values of Variables and Pearson Correlation Analysis Coefficients**

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Oxford Happiness	106.32	21.68	-						
Interpersonal Sensivity									
2. Low Social Self-Esteem	13.23	4.93	-.553***						
3. Interpersonal Worry and Addiction	46.37	13.20	-.450***	.420***	-				
4. Non-Assertive Behavior	22.48	5.61	.090*	-.006	.397***	-			
Academic Achievement									
5. Academic Confidence	48.46	9.62	.445***	-.384***	-.410***	-.151**	-		
6. Academic Effort	41.31	10.11	.493***	-.292***	-.314***	-.043	.697***	-	
Experience in Close Relationship									
7. Worry	18.83	4.25	-.231***	.210***	.437***	.045	-.164**	-.160**	-
8. Avoidance	14.31	4.43	-.127**	.237***	.091	.061	-.027	.049	-.110

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ ,

Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to determine the most important variables predicting the happiness levels of the participants. Accordingly, four models in which four variables, namely low social self-esteem, academic effort, interpersonal worry and dependency, and non-assertive behaviors were included one by one, were found to be statistically significant. In the first model, only the variable of lack of social self-confidence was included in the model and predicted happiness at a statistically significant level ( $R^2 = .30, F(1, 408) = 179.50, p < .001$ ). The lack of social self-confidence dimension of the interpersonal sensitivity scale alone explained 30% of the variance in happiness scores. As people's lack of social self-confidence increases, their happiness scores decrease. In the second model, academic effort scores, one of the variables of social lack of self-confidence and academic self-concept, significantly explained happiness ( $R^2 = .42, F(2, 407) = 150.79, p < .001$ ). In this model including academic effort, academic effort contributed 12% to the explanation of the variance in happiness scores when the effect of lack of social self-confidence was held constant. Accordingly, as the academic effort of individuals increases, their happiness levels also increase. The interpersonal worry and dependency sub-dimension of the interpersonal sensitivity scale was included in Model 3 ( $R^2 = .45, F(3, 406) = 112.48, p < .001$ ), and the sub-dimension of non-assertive behaviors was included in Model 4 ( $R^2 = .49, F(4, 405) = 99.10, p < .001$ ), which significantly explained happiness scores. Accordingly, when the effects of the variables in the model were held constant, the interpersonal anxiety and dependency variable included in Model 3 contributed 3% to explain the change in happiness scores, and the non-assertive behaviors included in Model 4 contributed 4%. While being in anxious and dependent interpersonal relationship sensitivity decreases the level of happiness, non-assertive interpersonal approaches increase the level of happiness. In the presence of all these variables, it was found that the Anxiety and Avoidance dimensions in the Inventory of Experiences in Close Relationships and the academic confidence variables in the academic self-concept were not included in any model and did not have a significant effect in explaining the level of happiness. The findings related to the analysis are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Stepwise Regression Analysis on the Prediction of Happiness Level with Experiences in Close Relationships, Interpersonal Sensitivity and Academic Self-Concept Variables**

Predictor Variable	R <sup>2</sup> (ΔR <sup>2</sup> )	F	ΔR <sup>2</sup> for F	Constant	B	SE B	β	t
<b>1.Model</b>	.306	179.50	-	138.488				
Low Social Self-Esteem					-2.43	.181	-.553	-13.39***
<b>2.Model</b>	.424 (.120)	150.78	85.07	100.232				
Low Social Self-Esteem					-1,965	,173	-.447	-11,378***
Academic Effort					,777	,084	,362	9,223***
<b>3.Model</b>	.450 (.028)	112.48	21.03	114,256				
Low Social Self-Esteem					-1,665	,181	-.379	-9,207***
Academic Effort					,692	,084	,323	8,205***
Interpersonal Worry and Addiction					-.312	,068	-.190	-4,586***
<b>4.Model</b>	.490 (.041)	99.10	32.65	101,722				
Low Social Self-Esteem					-1,468	,178	-.334	-8,267***
Academic Effort					,665	,081	,310	8,175***
Interpersonal Worry and Addiction					-.496	,073	-.302	-6,795***
Non-Assertive Behavior					,871	,152	,225	5,714***

\*\*\*p<.001

## RESULTS and DISCUSSION

In this study, university students' levels of explaining their subjective well-being were examined by focusing on different life domains. These life domains are considered as close relationships, social relationships (friendship) and academic life. In the study, interpersonal sensitivity for social relationship (friendship) experiences, academic self-concept for academic experiences, and experiences in attachment-based close relationships for close-romantic experiences were selected and their levels of explaining subjective well-being were examined. The results obtained are argued within this framework. Although there are studies on the explanatory role of similar variables related to the related life domains in subjective well-being, in this study, the role and priority of variables representing each of the different life domains in explaining subjective well-being were examined together. In this examination, the variables selected for each life domain were evaluated together with their dimensions. The stepwise regression findings were discussed together with the correlation results.

Firstly, when the correlation analyses are examined, it is seen that each of the sub-dimensions of interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-concept and experiences in close relationships have a statistically significant relationship with subjective well-being (happiness). When these relationships were analyzed in terms of life domains, it was observed that the interpersonal sensitivity variable selected for social relationships showed a significant negative correlation with the low social self-esteem and interpersonal worry and dependency sub-dimensions of happiness. However, unexpectedly and interestingly, the non-assertive behaviors dimension shows a positive linear relationship with happiness. As the low social self-esteem and interpersonal worry increase, the level of happiness decreases, whereas the increase in the dimension of non-assertive behaviors increases the level of happiness.

In terms of close-romantic relationship life domain, both anxiety and avoidance dimensions of experiences in close relationships were found to have a significant and negative relationship with happiness. An increase in anxiety and avoidance levels in close relationships is associated with a decrease in happiness levels. Finally, the relationship between university students' academic self-concept and happiness levels is positive for both academic confidence and academic effort dimensions. This finding can be interpreted as an increase in academic effort and academic confidence levels of university students has a positive effect on their happiness levels.

When the findings of the stepwise regression analysis of all variables related to the life domains selected in the study were analyzed, it was seen that four statistically significant models emerged in explaining happiness. In the first model, only "low social self-esteem", one of the dimensions of interpersonal sensitivity, was included in the model and explained 30% of the variance in happiness scores. When taken together with the correlation values, this result shows that the increase in university students' low social self-esteem levels is a significant predictor of the decrease in their happiness levels. Previous studies have consistently

demonstrated the positive effect of self-esteem on happiness (Srivastava et al., 2015; Schimmack & Diener, 2003; Duy & Yıldız, 2019). More specifically, in a study conducted by Du et al. (2017) by drawing attention to the distinction between personal, collective and relational self esteem, it was found that when the effect of personal self esteem was controlled, relational self esteem was associated with life satisfaction, positive mood, meaning of life, happiness and subjective vitality, while collective self esteem did not have a similar effect. It is clear that self-esteem, which includes positive and negative evaluations of oneself, is closely related to subjective well-being. For subjective well-being, which reflects the cognitive and emotional evaluation of life, negative evaluations of these evaluations decrease happiness, while positive evaluations increase it. Therefore, it is expected that individuals who have positive evaluations of themselves and their social relationships will have positive evaluations of their lives and experience positive emotions more frequently and get more satisfaction from life.

In the second model, it was determined that only academic effort, one of the dimensions of the academic self-concept, was included in the model and predicted happiness by 12% when the effect of low social self-esteem was held constant. This finding is in line with the correlation values and reveals that the increase in academic effort is positively reflected on happiness levels. On the other hand, although academic confidence had a significant and positive relationship with happiness, as a component of academic self-concept, it was not included as a variable predicting happiness in the regression models. When the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that the relationship between academic achievement and subjective well-being is addressed rather than the concept of academic self (e.g., Bucker et al., 2018; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Gökalp, 2020) and there is a limited number of studies on academic self-concept (Céspedes et al., 2021; Ariani 2021; Povedano-Diaz et al., 2020). This can be explained by the fact that the academic self-concept plays an important role in academic achievement and motivation (Huang, 2011). It is seen that high levels of academic self-efficacy increase goal-oriented, self-regulatory behaviors and contribute to the setting of higher goals and have a positive effect on academic achievement (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Ariani, 2021). In the regression stages, the inclusion of academic effort in the model can be evaluated with the explanations of Flow Theory, one of the subjective well-being theories that deals with effort and goal-oriented goals. According to Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014); being constantly engaged in the same activities for a long time can lead to negative emotions such as boredom and frustration. In this context, effortful, challenging and goal-oriented activities, although initially challenging, stimulate the urge to enjoy and increase subjective well-being (Csikszentmihalyi 2014; Nakamura et al., 2009). In a study conducted by Ariani (2021), it was examined how the subjective well-being of students with different goals differed in terms of academic self-efficacy and their emotional state at school, and the results revealed that mastery-oriented goals were the factor that most consistently and positively affected students' well-being.

In the third and fourth stages, the variables included in the model and explaining happiness were again related to the social-friendship life domain. In the third stage, interpersonal worry and dependency sub-dimensions of interpersonal sensitivity were included in the model, while in the fourth stage, non-assertive behaviors were added to the model. The results show that the contribution of interpersonal worry and dependency to happiness levels is at the level of 3% when the effect of the variables included in the first two stages model (lack of social self-confidence and academic effort) is controlled. This finding is in line with the results of the study conducted by Çolakoğlu and Yurcu (2019). In the said study, it was found that there was a negative relationship between interpersonal worry and dependency and life satisfaction, which represents the cognitive aspect of happiness, and the explanatory role of interpersonal anxiety and dependency on life satisfaction was found to be significant but low (Çolakoğlu and Yurcu 2019). Similarly, in a study conducted by Bilgin (2020), it was found that interpersonal worry and dependence negatively affect psychological resilience, one of the basic concepts related to happiness. Interpersonal worry and dependency, which reflect intense anxiety in interpersonal relationships and overemphasizing the opinions and feedback of others in an intense fear, are closely related to social anxiety with these characteristics (Harb et al., 2002). Numerous studies show that social anxiety is one of the problems that reduce subjective well-being (Ye et al., 2021; Karasar & Baytemir, 2018, Li et al., 2017, Neto, 2001). These results are in line with the explanations that social anxiety disorder reduces the motivation to socialize and negatively affects the individual's perception of happiness by reducing the sense of enjoyment gained through socializing (Li et al., 2017). In this context, the view that establishing social relationships is an important source of happiness is supported (Karasar & Baytemir, 2018). In the light of the literature, it can be said that the anxiety experienced by individuals with high interpersonal

sensitivity in social relationships increases the experience of negative emotions such as anxiety, and cognitive biases (cognitive distortion / bias) serve as a source of ignoring positive experiences and prevent happiness.

In the last phase when the effect of the variables in the first three models is controlled in the 4th model, the explanatory power of the change in non-assertive behaviors on happiness levels is 4%. When the correlation and regression analysis findings of non-assertive behaviors (NABs) and the emphasis of the literature on happiness are evaluated together, it is thought that the positive relationship between the variables is surprising. Because studies generally show that there is a positive relationship between assertiveness and happiness and well-being and that assertiveness trainings have an effect on increasing happiness levels (Paezy et al., 2010; Belen, 2021; Sarkova et al., 2013; Plantade-Gipch et al., 2023; Sousa & Podavini, 2021; Ateş, 2016). The positive relationship between assertiveness, which is also considered as a part of behaviors such as extraversion personality trait or social skills, and subjective well-being is understandable. Because assertiveness includes flexible thinking and the ability to establish healthy relationships, it is also considered as a basic skill that supports happiness (Sousa & Padovani, 2021). On the other hand, in the current study, the relationship between non-assertive behaviors and happiness was found to be negative. This may be due to differences in the conceptualization of assertive behaviors and may also be associated with the dynamics of the social structure (individualistic or collective). In addition, the non-assertive behaviors exhibited by individuals with high interpersonal sensitivity may result in more recognition and approval within group dynamics. In fact, in a study conducted by Paezy et al. (2010) to examine the causes of assertiveness, it was found that the fear of not receiving approval was identified as the main reason for non-assertive behavior. This result is explained by the fact that in collectivist societies, group importance and harmony are among the dynamics prioritized by cultural patterns. In addition, the results of the study conducted by Çolakoğlu and Yurcu (2019) are similar to the results of the current study. In the related study, it was found that there was no significant relationship between non-assertive behaviors and life satisfaction, which constitutes the cognitive aspect of happiness, whereas the strongest factor that positively predicts the life satisfaction of non-assertive behaviors is the interpersonal sensitivity dimension.

Finally, a noteworthy finding of the study is that the components of close relationship experiences related to romantic relationship experiences (anxiety and avoidance) did not appear in any of the models except for positive and significant correlations, indicating that they do not function as predictors of subjective well-being. However, romantic relationships reflect a transformation of attachment styles established with parents, especially the mother, in early experiences and are one of the variables associated with subjective well-being (Gómez-López, et al., 2019; Weisskirch, 2017; Khan et al., 2022). The results of many studies based on attachment to close relationships also reveal the negative relationship between anxious and avoidant attachment styles and happiness (Peng et al., 2023; Li & Fung., 2014; Khan et al., 2022; Gómez-López, et al., 2019; Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2005). While the correlation values obtained in this context show that the current study is in line with the explanations and findings in the literature, the regression results reveal that close relationship experiences do not predict subjective well-being for young adults when evaluated together with social relationships and academic self-concepts. This result is surprising and noteworthy for emerging adults (Arnett, 2000) who are expected to seek deep relationships in their close relationship experiences. This result may be related to one of the limitations of the study, which is that the participants were not asked whether they were in a romantic relationship while evaluating their experiences in close relationships. As a matter of fact, in a study conducted by Demir (2010) in emerging adults, the happiness levels of university students with and without partners were compared and the results obtained showed that only relationship experiences with mothers and best friends predicted happiness for individuals without partners. In the same study, it was found that the predictors of happiness for university students with a partner were mother-child relationship quality, romantic relationship quality and conflict. These findings suggest that the variables explaining happiness may differ for emerging adults who are not in a partner relationship and also show the importance of relationship quality. Other reasons why anxious and avoidant attachment styles do not predict happiness can be explained by the variability of attachment styles according to age (Chopik, & Edelstein, 2014; Chopik, et al., 2013), relationship stability (Sagone, et al., 2023) and the fact that partners have different attachment styles (Amarachukwu, et al., 2021). Indeed, on the basis of attachment theory, it is stated that the principle of reciprocity is not necessary and therefore both partners may not attach equal importance to secure attachment (Amarachukwu, et al., 2021). Therefore, in a reciprocal relationship, the attachment style of one of the parties may play a role in influencing the reflections of the insecure attachment style of the other. In a

study examining the relationship between adult attachment styles and psychological well-being according to age groups (young adults, adults) and relationship status (singles versus close relationships), it was found that married individuals with stable close relationships had higher levels of psychological well-being than singles (Sagone et al., 2023). In addition, just as personal goals or goals related to stable relationships (marriage) may change dynamically at different times of adulthood (Carstensen, 2006), the effect of avoidant attachment to close partners may be different for people of different ages (Li & Fung, 2014). In summary, the findings of this research can be assessed within the context of cultural structure and dynamics. It is seen that the predictive role of attachment styles on subjective well-being may vary in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Galinha, et al., 2014; Amarachukwu et al., 2021).

In a collectivist culture, emotional attachment becomes culturally expected at a certain age. In this context, the young adult perceives the necessity of fulfilling this expectation as part of the culture in which he/she lives, and therefore expectation from the relationship ceases to be a dynamic that needs to be addressed. As a result, young adults live life not only in search of happiness and greater fulfillment, but also in a routine (Amarachukwu et al., 2021; pp,38). When all these literature emphases are evaluated together, it is somewhat understandable that attachment-based close relationship dynamics are not predictive of happiness in the current research results. However, it is clear that this relationship should be addressed in a more in-depth and multidimensional manner, supported by different research and empirical evidence.

### **CONCLUSION and SUGGESTIONS**

The results of this study revealed that all components of interpersonal sensitivity, academic self-concept and experiences in close relationships were related to subjective well-being. These relationships indicate that low social self-esteem, which is one of the components of interpersonal sensitivity, and high levels of interpersonal worry and dependency are negatively reflected on happiness levels. Similarly, it was concluded that increased levels of anxiety and experience avoidance in close relationship experiences were associated with low levels of subjective well-being. In addition, it was observed that an increase in the levels of academic effort and academic confidence, which are elements of the academic self-concept, reflected positively on happiness levels.

Based on the results of the stepwise regression analysis conducted in line with the purpose and hypotheses of the study, it was concluded that low social self-esteem, one of the components of interpersonal sensitivity, had the highest effect in predicting happiness. Similarly, it was observed that academic effort is one of the predictors of happiness and has the second highest effect among the research variables. Finally, it was observed that the factors that play an explanatory role on happiness again come from the sub-components of interpersonal sensitivity, and these factors, which are called interpersonal worry and dependency and non-assertive behaviors, explain happiness to a limited extent.

It is thought that the findings obtained in the study regarding the variables that do not predict subjective well-being as well as the variables that explain subjective well-being present significant and remarkable results, although they are surprising. The most striking among these results is that despite the significant and negative correlations between close relationship experiences and happiness, anxiety and avoidance, which are among these experiences, do not have a predictive role in happiness. Similarly, academic confidence shares the same situation. These results are discussed in detail in the discussion and limitations section in the light of the explanations and findings in the literature.

When the results of the research are considered from a holistic perspective, they suggest the need for a more detailed investigation of the roles of assessments across different life domains in explaining subjective well-being. This is because happiness includes evaluations of specific aspects of life as well as evaluations of life in general. Therefore, when variables covering a wide range of life come together, their effects on subjective well-being (happiness) may vary. In this context, it is recommended to increase the number of studies that address elements related to different domains of life collectively.

### **Declarations**

#### **Conflict of Interest**

No potential conflicts of interest were disclosed by the author with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

#### **Ethics Approval**

Ethics committee approval for the current study was obtained from Izmir Bakırçay University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee on 26. 07. 2023 with decision number 1131.

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## Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the Izmir Bakırçay University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number/ID: 1131. Hereby, we as the authors consciously assure that for the manuscript the following is fulfilled:

- This material is the author's own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere.
- The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner.
- The results are appropriately placed in the context of prior and existing research.
- All sources used are properly disclosed.

## Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The design of the study and each stage of the manuscript (topic, design, data collection, data analysis, discussion of the findings) and proofreading of the manuscript sections were carried out by the author F.S.

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