

# Parental Attitude Perceived by University Students as Predictors of Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction

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The study aims to analyze whether parental attitudes (democratic, protective, and authoritarian) predict subjective well-being and life satisfaction of university students. Subjects in the study were 414 students, 221 female and 193 male. Perceived Parental Attitudes Scale, Subjective Well-Being Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale were used as data collection tools. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used in the analysis of data. Positive significant relationship was found between democratic parental attitude and subjective well-being and life satisfaction scores; negative relation was found between protective and authoritarian parental attitude and subjective well-being and life satisfaction scores ( $p < .001$ ). According to regression analysis, perceived parental attitudes predict subjective well-being and life satisfaction significantly

**Keywords:** Parental Attitude; Subjective Well-Being; Life Satisfaction

## Introduction

Subjective well-being is defined as individuals' regarding their lives as being valuable (Diener, 2000). Subjective well-being is a term related to a person's being aware of his potential, purpose of life and also psychological well-being which determines interpersonal relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). There are three points which determine the level of subjective well-being: general life satisfaction, multitude of positive feelings and scarcity of negative feelings (Myers & Diener, 1995).

Subjective well-being is the overall evaluation about how individuals regard their life in various aspects. People can make an evaluation based on a general judgment such as the course of their life, life satisfaction and sense of achievement; it includes a general evaluation of an individual upon living spaces such as school, marriage or business or their current feelings (Diener, 2000, 1984). According to this, if individuals are satisfied with their living space and they experience more positive and less negative feelings, it can be said that they have a high level of subjective well-being, since it depends on the *measurement of positive feelings*.

Subjective well-being consisting of three components: life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood and the absence of negative mood together often summarized as happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Life satisfaction reflects the sum of an individual's positive feelings about the quality of his life and cognitive judgment about this satisfaction (Dost, 2004). Subjective well-being and happiness are equivalent with the term life satisfaction (Veenhoven, 1996; Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 2003). In the literature, life satisfaction was defined as the

attitude towards life determined as time for work, spare time and off-hours (Diener, 2000), compensation of basic needs and other attainable needs at a certain extent (Bradley & Corwyn, 2004), being well in the sense of happiness and spirits (Vara, 1999) and positive feelings being dominant over negative feeling in daily tasks (Aksaray, Yıldız, & Ergün, 1998).

Studies show that there is a positive significant relation between subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Petito & Cumins, 2000; Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Dew & Hubner, 1994). On the other hand, variables which indicate and increase general life quality such as emotional intelligence, humor (Tümekaya, Hamarta, Deniz, Çelik, & Aybek, 2008), self-respect (Hamarta, 2009; Huebner, Gilman, & Laughlin, 1999), happiness (Furnham & Cheng, 2000), subjective well-being (Tuzgöl-Dost, 2010), problem solving (Hamarta, 2009), and coping with stress (Deniz, 2006) were also studied. Moreover different sampling groups such as problematic teenagers (Köker, 1991), university students (Deniz & Yılmaz, 2004) and university academicians (Tümekaya et al., 2008) were considered.

Family which is one of the individual, objective and social elements (Toros, 2001) determine the quality of life satisfaction and is placed on the basis of individual and society relation. Parent factor which forms the family has also an important role in determination of children's life (Baumrind, 1980). Studies on child-rearing attitudes of developmental psychology is based on very old dates. Parental attitude was also mentioned in Psychodynamic and Behavioral Model, Baumrind's Classification, and Maccoby and Martin Model (Yılmaz, 2000). The Baumrind (1966), classification for the parental attitude as permissive,

authoritarian, and authoritative is one of the first studies. However, many studies and classifications have been made regarding the attitudes of parents so far. In this study, only authoritarian, democratic and protective parental attitudes were examined.

Parents who have *democratic parental attitude* feel sincere, deep and unconditional affection towards child. They are sensitive towards the needs and interests of the child, observe his behavior with interest and tolerance, and permit the child to behave autonomously. They give information about family rules and place specific limits, yet discuss these limits with the child if required (Baumrind, 1966). Since the child can express his feelings and thoughts with ease, he begins to develop confidence (Yavuzer, 2003). Parents who have that sort of attitude respect their child's character by giving unconditional affection and make efforts to develop his sense of responsibility (Gökçedağ, 2001). At the same time, while they give opportunity to child to behave autonomously and utilize them as a source whenever he wants; they explain family rules on the other hand (Baumrind, 1966). Parents who have authoritarian parental attitude form child's behaviors according to social standards and expect him to obey without questioning. They use force and punishment for behaviors apart from these standards (Baumrind, 1966). A child who has grown up in such an environment would feel under pressure and since from an early age the development of self-confidence and self-respect has been restricted (Yavuzer, 2003). Parents who have *protective parental attitude* are quite cautious and have difficulty in separating from the child. Since they bear the whole responsibility of the child they bring up individuals who are dependent and cannot make their own decisions (Parker, 1983). These children do not confront stressful conditions all through their lives, they therefore experience anxiety when in a stressful environment (Carducci & Zimbardo, 1995). Those which influence psycho-social development of children are protective attitude which is defined as "overindulgence of children" and authoritarian attitude in which individual rights are not respected (Eldeleklioğlu, 1996). Parental attitudes were studied with variables which influence network of social relations such as problem solving (Hamarta, Baltacı, Üre, & Demirbaş, 2010), shyness (Demirbaş, 2009) and social anxiety (Erkan, 2002). It is understood that the family environment which is the most suitable for psycho-social development of children and teenagers is the democratic family environment in which there is an equality between parents and children and in which there is a basis of both love and respect (Eldeleklioğlu, 1996).

In the light of the theoretical frame mentioned above it can be suggested that subjective well-being and life satisfaction might be related to given factors. However there has been no study where parental attitude of university students is considered in relation to subjective well-being and life satisfaction. The focus question for this study is: Do parental attitudes significantly predict subjective well-being and life satisfaction?

## Method

### Participants

Sampling of the study consists of 414 students in total, 221 (53%) females and 193 (47%) males, who were enrolled at Selcuk University. Age range of the participants is 17 - 26, average age is 19.72,  $SS = 1.54$ .

### Instruments

**Parental Attitude Scale:** The first form of the Parental Attitude Scale was developed by Kuzgun and Eldeleklioğlu (1996). This form was later revised by Kuzgun and Eldeleklioğlu (2005). Perceived parental attitudes are determined by 40 items, Democratic (15 items), Protective (15 items) and authoritarian (10 items). The assessment is a Likert-type Scale each item is scored between 1 and 5. Scores of Democratic, Protective and authoritarian attitudes are measured separately. Coefficient of internal consistency of Democratic sub-scale is .89, stability factor is .92; coefficient of internal consistency of Preventive/Demanding sub-scale is .82, stability factor is .75; coefficient of internal consistency of authoritarian sub-scale is .78, stability factor is .79.

**Subjective Well-Being Scale:** In the study, data about subjective well-being were obtained using Subjective Well Being Scale developed by Dost (2004). The scale is composed of 46 items and includes personal judgment about living spaces and positive or negative feeling statements. A factor analysis was carried out to assess the validity of SWS; it was determined that SWS has 12 factors whose eigen-value is above 1. Moreover; corrected item-total correlation of the scale was analyzed, and it was observed that it varies between .32 and .63. On the other hand, in order to determine distinctiveness of the test 27% over under averages of scores which were obtained with the application of 46 item scale on 209 people was compared with t-test.

Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of Subjective Well Being Scale was .93. In order to find the consistency coefficient of the scale the scale was applied on 39 people in the study group two times every two weeks and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was found .86 (Dost, 2004).

**Life Satisfaction Scale:** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) and adapted to Turkish by Köker (1991) was used. The SWLS measures global life satisfaction and consists of 5 items of which the values are evaluated according to 7 scores (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). According to the results of the reliability study of the scale, the test retest reliability was  $r = .85$  and item total correlations varied between .71 and .80.

### Procedure

The data of the study were collected from the students studying at Konya Selcuk University/Turkey. The participants of the study were informed about the aim, measures of the study and the principles of volunteerism. The participants were informed that the papers should be anonymous, but they should be frank in order to facilitate the reliability of the study. The measures were answered approximately in 35 minutes period. Some of the students participated in the study had missing answers on their papers, these students papers were not evaluated.

### Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed with 14.0 SPSS program by using multiple regression analysis and Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

### Findings

Relationship between subjective well being and life satisfaction which are dependent variables and parental attitude which is predictor variable are given in **Table 1**.

As it is seen in **Table 1**, there is a positive significant relation between democratic parent attitude and subjective well being ( $r = .44$ ,  $r = .42$ ;  $p < .001$ ); and negative significant relation between protective parent attitude and subjective well being ( $r = -.26$ ,  $r = -.24$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and authoritarian parent attitude and subjective well being ( $r = -.40$ ,  $r = -.33$   $p < .01$ ).

As it is seen in **Table 2**; there is a positive significant relation between democratic mother attitude and life satisfaction ( $r = .35$ ;  $p < .001$ ), between democratic father attitude and life satisfaction ( $r = .37$ ;  $p < .001$ ), negative significant relation between protective mother attitude and life satisfaction ( $r = -.21$ ;  $p < .001$ ), between authoritarian mother attitude and life satisfaction ( $r = -.31$ ;  $p < .001$ ); between protective father attitude and

life satisfaction ( $r = -.25$ ;  $p < .001$ ), between authoritarian father attitude and life satisfaction ( $r = -.26$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Perceived mother attitudes ( $R^2 = .227$ ,  $F = 40.235$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and perceived father attitudes ( $R^2 = .199$ ,  $F = 33.980$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of university students predict subjective well-being significantly. Perceived mother attitudes explain 22.7% of the variance in subjective well-being, perceived father attitudes explain 19.9%. When the predictors of subjective well being are considered, it was found that democratic and authoritarian mother attitude among perceived mother attitudes; democratic and protective father attitude among father attitudes are significant predictors of life satisfaction.

In **Table 4**, perceived mother attitudes ( $R^2 = .143$ ,  $F = 22.804$ ,

**Table 1.**  
Correlations between subjective well being and parental attitudes.

	Democratic mother	Protective mother	Authoritarian mother	Democratic father	Protective father	Authoritarian father
<b>Subjective well being</b>	.44***	-.26***	-.40***	.42***	-.24***	-.33***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.**  
Correlations between life satisfaction and parental attitudes.

	Democratic mother	Protective mother	Authoritarian mother	Democratic father	Protective father	Authoritarian father
<b>Life satisfaction</b>	.35***	-.21***	-.31***	.37***	-.25***	-.26***

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.**  
Explanation of well being by parental attitudes.

Dependent variable	$R^2$	$F$	$\beta$	Independent variables	$t$
Well being	.227	40.235***	.310	Democratic mother	5.823***
			-.040	Protective mother	-.736
			-.201	Authoritarian mother	-3.139**
Well being	.199	33.980***	.348	Democratic father	6.591***
			-.109	Protective father	-2.037*
			-.079	Authoritarian father	-1.284

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.**  
Explanation of life satisfaction by parental attitudes.

Dependent variable	$R^2$	$F$	$\beta$	Independent variables	$t$
Life satisfaction	.143	22.804***	.267	Democratic mother	4.761***
			-.058	Protective mother	-1.009
			-.118	Authoritarian mother	-1.755
Life satisfaction	.158	25.641***	.328	Democratic father	6.045***
			-.169	Protective father	-3.084**
			.013	Authoritarian father	.206

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

$p < .001$ ) and perceived father attitudes ( $R^2 = .158$ ,  $F = 25.641$ ,  $p < .001$ ) explain life satisfaction significantly. Perceived mother attitudes explain 14.3% of the variance in life satisfaction, perceived father attitudes explain 15.8% of the variance in life satisfaction. When the predictors of life satisfaction are considered, it was found that only democratic mother attitude among perceived mother attitudes; and democratic and protective father attitude among father attitudes are significant predictors of life satisfaction.

## Discussion and Recommendations

According to the findings obtained in this study, there are significant relations between parental attitudes, subjective well being and life satisfaction. Findings show that parental attitudes are important variables which predict subjective well being and life satisfaction. This finding has similarity with the findings of Tuzgöl Dost (2006, 2010), Petito and Cummins (2000), Sastre and Ferriere (2000) and Shek (2005). In this study the subjective well-being of university students who perceive their parent as democratic was higher than those students who perceive their parents as authoritarian and preventive. Children who are brought up in a democratic environment being loved unconditionally, presenting their emotion and thoughts freely, participating in the decisions about himself, being given responsibility and permission to behave autonomously may enable them to develop self-confidence (Baumrind, 1966; Gökçedağ, 2001; Yavuzer, 2003) and this might increase their subjective well-being.

The findings of this study show that there is a positive relation between democratic parental attitude and subjective well being and life satisfaction, and a negative relationship between protective and authoritarian parental attitude and subjective well being and life satisfaction. According to research, while positive perception of family functions is related with high psychological well being, social support from family is a significant predictor of life satisfaction (Suldo & Huebner, 2004). This finding has great contribution in explanation of high subjective well being of individuals who are brought up in a democratic family environment. Moreover active participation of individuals in the decisions about themselves helps to enable important life satisfaction in the sense of developing sense of responsibility and controlling changes in his life.

The negative relation between protective father attitude and subjective well being and life satisfaction indicates that while university students wish their parent to support them without interfering less, it points to the necessity that prevention shall not be related with interference. Findings show that perceived parental attitudes are important factors in subjective well being of individuals and attaining life satisfaction. Life satisfaction, warm family environment are influenced by democratic attitude towards children and family support (Saha, Huebner, Suldo, & Valois, 2010; Young, Miller, Norton, & Hill, 1995; Leung & Leung, 1992; Shek, 1997a; BrajšaŽganec, Šakić, & RabotegŠarić, 2004).

The similarity between American (Dew & Huebner's, 1994) and Chinese (Leung & Leung, 1992; Shek, 1997) sampling and Turkish sampling as a result of this study makes us to think that supporting the independence of teenagers in societies during development process would contribute to their subjective well being, development of life satisfaction and social participation significantly. Thus, researches carried out on the fact that teen-

agers who are brought up in a supportive family environment communicate more actively and feel more comfortable in communicating (Joronen & Åstedt-Kurki, 2005) are supporting the findings of the study.

In addition among the other perceived parental attitudes, it is seen that there are important relations between perceived democratic parental attitude and life satisfaction and subjective well being. When we consider that individuals having internal locus of control and autonomous are coming from democratic families (Baumrind, 1971) education, seminars and informative studies which will enable parents to form democratic attitudes towards their children may have important contributions. The main restriction of the study was that it was only carried out on university students. In this sense, in order to increase generalization of the study; groups including childhood and adolescence periods and parent sampling may have important contribution to the study field.

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