

## An Investigation of Subjective Well-Being in Terms of Coping with Stress and Decision-Making in University Students

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to investigate subjective well-being in terms of coping with stress and decision-making in University students. The participants were 472 (237 female and 235 male, between 18-26 years old) university students. Data were collected from subjective well-being scale, Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire (DMQ) and coping with stress scale. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis were determined. As a result of the study, it was found that there was a significant negative relationship between subjective well-being, buck passing, procrastination and hyper vigilance. Also it was found that there was a significant positive relationship between subjective well-being and problem focused coping, seeking social support, decision self-esteem and vigilance. Besides, it was found that some approaches of coping with stress scale and some approaches of decision making significantly explain subjective well-being scale.

**Key words:** Subjective well-being • Coping with stress • Decision making • University students

### INTRODUCTION

Stress is the effort made by the individual beyond the physical and psychological limits due to discordant conditions in the physical and social environment [1].

According to Lazarus and Folkman stress occurs as a result of the person and environment interaction. The important thing in this interaction is that the individuals should perceive and consider the events and the persons as the source of stress. In this interaction, if the individual does not consider the events and persons as a source of stress, he/she will not have any stress [2].

According to the researches, the individuals dealing with stress and applying to daily life are the individuals that think first and act later and are flexible based on the situation. These individuals having extrovert traits can easily express themselves and are patient. They accept the situations that they cannot change and does not make too much emotional and intellectual consumption. In case of failure, they try to find new solutions by searching the reasons in themselves not in the environment [3].

According to Baltaş and Baltaş assessing the personality traits that make it difficult to deal with stress, the individuals that have a sense of hostility, that feel a sense of guilt for everything, that are oversensitive and have emotional reactions, that consider the events as too good or too bad, that have passive and immature personality traits fail to deal with the stress. According to the theory of interactional stress and dealing with stress developed by Folkman and Lazarus, stress occurs when there is instability between the requirements of the situation and the resources of the individual in the case of a compelling situation. In another words, stress occurs as a result of the “individual-environment interaction” that compels or exceeds the individual resources and/or that is considered by the individual as a threat to their peace or general well-being.

According to some researchers “the dealing with” defines to overcome the requirements and difficulties of the inner and outer world of the individual, to keep them under control and the cognitive and behavioral effort made to defuse the tensions. “The dealing with” generally protects the individual from negative physical and psychological results [2, 4, 5].

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Baltaş and Baltaş classified the means of “the dealing with” in three categories as physical, mental and behavioral. In the first group, there are loosening techniques, different physical exercises and diets. The means of “dealing with” in the second group include coping with the beliefs leading to discordance and mental arrangement technique. The means of “dealing with” in the third group are composed of changing any behavior pattern, secured initiative and time arrangement techniques. The important thing here is that the perceptual patterns of the individual lie behind the stress. The meanings attributed to events by the individuals, their assessments and directions are the main factor in reducing or increasing the stress [6, 7].

There are emotion-oriented and problem-oriented approaches in the strategy of dealing with the stress [8, 9]. In addition to these approaches, Folkman and Moskowitz mentioned about the meaning-oriented strategy and explained it as the interpretation of the events and the cognitive dimensions for the control [10]. Emotion-oriented strategies are used when the individual believes that the stress factor cannot be changed and it must be put up with; while the problem-oriented strategies are used for changing the stress factor and these might be direct efforts to be dominant to change the situation as well as the nerveless, reasonable and rational efforts for the solution of the problem [11, 12]. On the other hand, the individual may cope with the specific problem by finding a way to solve it or a way to avoid it in future. This is called the problem-oriented dealing with. Even if the individual cannot change a situation that causes stress, she/he might make some efforts to ease it. This progress is called the emotion-oriented dealing with [8, 13]. In the problem-oriented dealing with, the individual focuses on the problem and share their feelings about the problem with the others; moreover, the efforts in the problem-oriented dealing with, the efforts are for changing the stressful situation by solving the problem, making decision or addressing directly with the action [14].

The individuals are faced with the need to make many decision in their daily lives, but the structure of these situations might be rather complex [15]. In this situation, decision-making is defined as an orientation for solving the experienced situation when there is more than one way to reach in a required situation.

According to Heppner the decision-making includes the specific actions such as considering the options and monitoring the results. The accurate definition of a situation that requires a decision

brings along a correct approach in the solution [16, 17]. The choice of the individual in the decision-making progress is influenced by the environmental and individual factors. While the individuals believe that they generally have the control in the decision-making process, the others believe that the decision-making is influenced by the exterior factors. The important thing in the decision-making is seen as the control focuses of the individuals [18]. The effective roles of these control focuses in the decision-making process indicate that the decision-making process must be applied appropriately. Gelatt analyzed the decision-making process in three parts such as information, operation and choice [19]. Zeleny divided the decision-making process into three and discussed these processes as pre-decision, decision and post-decision period. The individuals should consider the information obtained in the decision-making process. They should categorize and assess the situation by deciding on and interpreting the ideal one [17, 20].

The decision-making style is another important determinant in the decision-making process. The situation that the individual approaches, reacts and act in a decision-making process is called as the decision-making style [21]. Therefore, the attitude of the individuals in the decision-making process and their manner against the events are important. The approach of the individual to a decision-making problem and the decision-making strategy including the methods in the decision making [22]. Kuzgun will influence the quality of the decision. The individuals apply different styles in the decision-making process. According to Deniz in the decision-making process, the individuals apply cautious, avoiding, postponing and panic decision-making styles [23].

The individuals applying cautious decision-making style search the relevant information before the decision-making and make their choices after attentively considering the alternatives. The individuals applying avoiding decision-making style avoid making decisions and they are pertinent to leave the decisions up to others. Therefore, they try to avoid making decisions by handing the responsibility to others. The individuals applying postponing decision-making style try to postpone, delay and retard the decisions. They always try to postpone the decisions without a valid reason. The individuals applying panic decision-making style feel under pressure whenever they are faced with a decision-making process. As a consequence, they are quick to reach hectic solutions by exhibiting thoughtless behaviors [23].

In a decision-making situation, it is determined that the individuals apply different strategies. The process that the individual designates how to act when faced with a situation requiring decision-making is called as decision-making strategy [24]. It is specified that the strategies can be applied conjointly with each other. While the strategies used in the decision-making situation can be planned before hand. They can also be determined when faced with the decision-making situation. The decision-making strategies can differ in terms of the efforts made and efficiency in their usage [25]. There are four main strategies used in the decision-making situation [26].

These are:

**Independent Decision-making Strategy:** To decide on one's own according to his/her desires.

**Rational Decision-making Strategy:** To think reasonably and rationally in a decision-making strategy, to gather information about the possible options, to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each option and to tend towards the most suitable option after the considerations.

**Inner-impulsive Decision-making Strategy:** To tend towards an option that will remove the decision-making problem by acting in a reactive and hectic way without thinking about the possible options.

**Uncertainty:** To be uncertain, hesitation; disorder, instability.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between subjective well-being and coping with stress and decision making styles. Also it was investigated that if the coping with stress and decision making styles significantly predicted subjective well-being.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Participants:** The survey model was used in the current study. The sample set of the research was taken from several faculties Selcuk University in Konya / Turkey. The participants were 472 (237 female and 235 male, between 18-26 years old) university students who participated in the research voluntarily.

**Instruments:** *Coping with stress scale (CSS):* CSS is 23-item Likert-type (*strongly agree=5, strongly disagree=1*) scale to measure styles of coping with stress.

The scale consists of 3 subscales. These are seeking social support, problem-focused coping and avoidance from coping with stress. Reliability coefficients for each subscale of the CSS were calculated as 0.85, 0.80 and 0.65 respectively. Total correlation for each subscale was found to be 0.61, 0.48 and 0.34 while the calculated correlation coefficient was found as 0.85 by the test-retest method [27].

**Decision-making Questionnaire (Dmq):** The Melbourne Decision-Making Questionnaire was developed by Mann, Burnett, Radford and Ford based on Flinder's Decision-Making Scale I-II. DMQ used in cross-cultural research that included six countries with the aim of comparing decision self-esteem and the decision-making styles of university students [28, 29].

The DMQ-I is a scale that aims to determine decision self-esteem level. It consists of 6 items. Grading is done by giving numerical values to items according to the answer as follows: *true for me:* score 2, *sometimes true:* score 1, *not true for me:* score 0. Higher scores are the indicators of a higher level of decision self-esteem. In this cross-cultural research, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.74. The DMQ-II consists of 22 items and measures decision-making styles. The scale has 4 subscales, namely vigilance (6 items), buck passing (6 items), procrastination (5 items) and hyper vigilance (5 items) decision-making styles. This scale is answered and scored in the same way as the DMQ-I. Reliability coefficients of the subscales were calculated as follows: for vigilance 0.80, buck passing 0.87, procrastination 0.81 and hyper vigilance 0.74 [28]. The adaptations of the DMQ-I and DMQ-II to Turkish were performed by Deniz [23]. The reliability coefficients obtained from subscales calculated by the test-retest method varied between  $r=0.68$  and  $r=0.87$ . Cronbach alpha coefficients of the DMQ I and DMQ-II varied between  $\alpha=0.65$  and  $\alpha=0.80$ . [23].

Scale validity similar to those of the DMQ-I and DMQ-II was performed with the Decision Strategy Scale (DSQ) [30]. Significant relationships between  $r=0.15$  and  $r=0.71$  were found between correlation coefficients of the DMQ I-II and DSQ [23].

**Subjective Well-being Scale (SWS):** SWS is a 46-item self report scale that intends to measure the degree of subjective well-being by assessing individuals' cognitive appraisals of their lives and the frequency and intensity with which they experience negative and positive feelings. The items include evaluative statements about major domains of life, positive and negative emotionality.

They were placed on a 5 point-Likert type scale (1 = disagree, 5 = fully agree). Higher scores indicate higher degree of subjective well-being. Cronbach-alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.93. In the present sample, internal consistency of the scale was found to be 0.93 too [31].

**Data Analysis:** SPSS 16.0 was used in order to evaluate the data which were collected by the scales employed in the research. The Pearson correlation coefficient technique was used to determine the relationship between subjective well-being with coping with stress and decision-making styles in university students. Multiple hierarchical regression analysis was used to search whether coping with stress and decision-making styles significantly explain subjective well-being.

### RESULTS

It is understood from Table 2 that in coping with stress there was a positive relationship between problem focused and subjective well being and there was a positive and significant ( $p<0.05$ ) relationship between seeking social support and subjective well being.

A significant positive relationship between subjective well-being and self esteem in decision making and vigilance was found. On the other hand, a significant level of negative relationship between subjective well being and buck passing, procrastination and hyper vigilance decision-making styles was found.

It was seen that coping with stress entered to the model, developed to explain the anger, in first was seen to be significant in the model ( $R^2=0.15$ ,  $F_{(3/468)}=28.20$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The sub-dimensions of coping with stress; Problem focused coping ( $\beta=-0.40$ ,  $p<.00$ ) and seeking avoidance ( $\beta=-0.14$ ,  $p<.00$ ) was found to be significant.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics.

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Avoidance	472	21.99	5.20
Problem focused	472	31.22	5.73
Seeking social support	472	25.17	4.19
Self-esteem in <i>decision making</i>	472	9.20	2.24
Vigilance	472	9.77	2.20
Buck passing	472	4.04	2.75
Procrastination	472	4.09	2.34
Hyper vigilance	472	4.11	2.23
Subjective well-being	472	173.55	25.25

Table 2: Correlations between subjective well-being, coping with stress and decision making styles.

	Subjective well-being
Avoidance	-0.01
Problem focused	0.37**
Seeking social support	0.14**
Self-esteem in <i>decision making</i>	0.51**
Vigilance	0.24**
Buck passing	-0.43**
Procrastination	-0.40**
Hyper vigilance	-0.43**

Decision making entered to the model in second step was found to be significant in the model, ( $R^2=0.36$ ,  $F_{(8/463)}=111.59$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The sub dimension of Decision making; self esteem in decision making ( $\beta=0.31$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), hyper vigilance ( $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and Procrastination ( $\beta=-0.11$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) were assumed to be significant.

### DISCUSSION

As a result of the statistical analysis, there lies a positive significant relationship between subjective well-being and problem-focused coping with and social support-seeking, self-esteem in decision making and

Table 3: Multiple hierarchical regression analysis on subjective well-being.

	Predictors	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>ch</sub>	F	df	Beta	$\beta$	p
1	(Costant)	.39 <sup>a</sup>	.15	.15	28.20	3/468	95.24		0.00**
	Avoidance						0.66	.14	0.00**
	Problem focused						1.75	.40	0.00**
	Seeking social support						0.36	.06	0.18
2	(Costant)	.60 <sup>b</sup>	.36	.35	32.88	8/463	111.59		0.00**
	Avoidance						0.00	.00	0.98
	Problem focused						0.82	.19	0.00**
	Seeking social support						0.55	.09	0.02*
	Self-esteem in <i>decision making</i>						0.34	.31	0.00**
	Vigilance						0.34	.03	0.49
	Buckpassing						-0.55	-.06	0.27
	Procrastination						-1.20	-.11	0.03**
	Hypervigilance						-1.31	-.12	0.04**

vigilance decision-making; and a negative significant relationship between buck passing decision-making, procrastination decision-making and hyper vigilance decision-making. It is observed as a result of the analysis about the explain ability of the subjective well-being with coping with stress and decision-making that while the coping with stress explains 15% of the subjective well-being, it explains 36% together with the decision-making. When the results of the t test about the relevance of the regression parameters are examined, the significant predictors are, in order of priorities, self-esteem in decision-making, problem-focus coping with, hyper vigilance decision-making and procrastination decision-making, respectively.

The choice of the individual in the decision-making progress is influenced by the environmental and individual factors [18]. One of the important individual factors is self-esteem. According to Coopersmith the attention of an individual receives from other people and the degree of acceptance and respect she/he feels has a role in self esteem development. High self-esteem makes an individual much more effective, happy, successful and confident when interacting with the environment [32, 33]. The self-esteem in decision-making is explained with the self-reliant behaviors and self-esteem of the individuals [34]. This situation can bear qualifications such as to explicitly express their thoughts, to be independent while making decisions and to feel free for doing anything they want [35]. The subjective well-being is a structure including the consideration of their lives and passing judgment. The individuals making decisions on their own independent from exterior effects in decision-making processes and having self-respect will be influenced less from the exterior factor considering their lives and they might have positive thoughts about their lives. There are also some studies considering the self-respect as an indicator of the subjective well-being in the literature [36]. Problem-focus coping with is an active dealing with strategy grounding on removing the situation that causes stress or reducing the effects. The individuals focusing on the problem in the stressful situations and dealing with it actively tend to make positive considerations when assessing their well-being. The same result has been reached in the other studies in this field [37]. The attitude of the individuals in the decision-making process and their manner against the events are important. [22]. The decision-making style is another important determinant in the decision-making process [21]. The individuals applying procrastination decision-making style try to postpone, delay and

retard the decisions without a reasonable cause. The individuals applying hypervigilance decision-making style feel under pressure when faced with a decision-making situation. Therefore, they tend to reach hectic solutions by exhibiting thoughtless behaviors [23]. The individuals applying the styles on the negative style of the decision-making styles will inevitably have negative feelings when faced with a decision-making situation. Therefore, the individuals that are required to make decisions in their daily lives and have panic when making decisions or postpone the decision-making process will live a life full of negative feelings. As it is not expected for the individuals living such a life to have high life satisfaction, it should also not be expected to have positive considerations about the subjective well-being.

As a consequence, it is presented that the subjective well-being is affected in a positive way from the dealing with stress and decision-making variables. In order for the subjective well-being considerations to be positive, the individuals should be supported to acquire effective strategies of dealing with stress in psychological aid processes and the techniques that will increase the self-respect in the decision-making process can be applied.

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