

Mediating Effect of Happiness in the Relationship between Positive Childhood Experiences and Social Media Addiction in Young Adults

Genç Yetişkinlerde Olumlu Çocukluk Yaşantıları ve Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı İlişkisinde Mutluluğun Aracılık Etkisi

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Abstract

Objective: This study focuses on exploring the connection between positive experiences during childhood, overall happiness, and the propensity for social media addiction in young adults.

Method: The study gathered data from 413 young adults in Turkey, averaging 25.73 years in age (Standard Deviation=4.77). Data collection involved using the Positive Childhood Experiences Scale, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, and the Social Media Addiction Scale. Mediation analysis was performed to examine the mediating effect of happiness.

Results: Positive childhood experiences were positively associated with happiness and negatively associated with social media addiction. There was a negative relationship between happiness and social media addiction. Happiness played a mediating role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction.

Conclusion: Participants with favorable experiences in childhood reported higher levels of happiness and less social media addiction. These results suggest that the social media addiction prevention and intervention programs should focus efforts on enhancing happiness and positive childhood experiences.

Keywords: Positive childhood experiences, happiness, social media addiction, young adults

Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı genç yetişkinlerde olumlu çocukluk yaşantıları, mutluluk ve sosyal medya bağımlılığı arasındaki ilişkisini araştırmaktır.

Yöntem: Veriler yaş ortalaması 25.73 (SS=4,77) olan 413 Türk genç yetişkinden elde edilmiştir. Veriler Olumlu Çocukluk Yaşantıları Ölçeği, Oxford Mutluluk Ölçeği ve Sosyal Medya Bağımlılığı Ölçeği aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Mutluluğun aracılık etkisini incelemek amacıyla aracılık analizi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular: Araştırmanın sonuçları, olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının mutlulukla pozitif, sosyal medya bağımlılığıyla ise negatif ilişkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Mutluluk ile sosyal medya bağımlılığı arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bulgular mutluluğun, olumlu çocukluk yaşantıları ile sosyal medya bağımlılığı arasındaki ilişkide aracı rol oynadığını da ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Sonuç: Çocuklukta olumlu deneyimler yaşayan katılımcılar daha yüksek düzeyde mutluluk ve daha az sosyal medya bağımlılığı yaşadıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Bu sonuçlar, sosyal medya bağımlılığını önleme ve müdahale programlarının mutluluğu ve olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarını artırma çabalarına odaklanması gerektiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Olumlu çocukluk yaşantıları, mutluluk, sosyal medya bağımlılığı, genç yetişkinler

Introduction

Childhood experiences are essential for the development and mental health of individuals throughout their lives (1). Positive childhood experiences refer to favorable experiences of internal and external perceived safety, security, and support from birth to age 18 (2). The Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework is based on the need to promote positive childhood experiences and to prevent or reduce adverse childhood experiences. The fundamental positive childhood experiences, such as being in nurturing and supportive relationships, gaining social and emotional competencies, functioning in safe, stable, protective and equitable environments, and having opportunities for constructive social participation and engagement, are essential to the healthy development of individuals (3).

These experiences contribute to the well-being of individuals as well as the healthy development, and are important factors in individuals' positive functioning in adulthood (4). In the literature, these experiences were positively associated with self-esteem, resilience (5), less psychopathological symptoms (6), and less substance use (4). Children whose parents were reported to be affectionate were found to have a reduced risk of mental health and developmental problems (1). These studies emphasize the importance of childhood experiences for the future of individuals. The expanding literature also provided evidence that positive childhood experiences had a relationship with less behavioral addictions. For example, these favorable experiences served as protective factors in the development of social media addiction (7).

Social media addiction refers to a type of behavioral addiction characterized by being excessively concerned about social media activities and an uncontrollable desire to use social media. This leads to impairments in work, interpersonal relationships, mental health and other important life areas (8). In the meta-analysis study, the prevalence rate of social media addiction was found to be 8% in Western/Northern Europe, 20% in Eastern/Southern Europe, 31% in Asia and 15% in North America (9). The recent study showed that the prevalence of social media addiction was 6.1% in Türkiye (10). These rates indicate that social media addiction is common among across nations.

In the literature, there are studies indicating the adverse effects of problematic social media use. A recent study with Turkish adolescents showed that social media addiction had a relationship with poor family functioning and low psychological adjustment (11). In addition, behavioral addictions such as internet addiction, smartphone addiction, digital game addiction and social media addiction negatively affected social connectedness (12) and the well-being of individuals (13). There are also studies regarding the relationship between childhood experiences and behavioral addiction. For example, early memories of warmth and safeness were negatively associated with mobile phone addiction (14). The longitudinal study showed that positive school experiences in childhood predicted less internet addiction in adolescence. On the other hand, neglect and community violence predicted higher levels of internet addiction (15). A history of adverse childhood experiences was positively associated with social media addiction (16). These studies show that individuals with less positive childhood experiences are more likely to develop behavioral addictions. Identifying the factors that regulate this relationship may reduce the development of these addictions. One of these factors may be happiness.

Happiness, which expresses joyful and pleasant emotions, is the individuals' cognitive and affective evaluation of their lives (17). Since the focus of happiness is the individual's own perspective, happiness can be considered as a synonym of subjective well-being. Subjective well-being emphasizes high levels of positive affect and satisfaction, and low levels of negative affect with one's own life (18). According to self-determination theory, the adequate functioning of a person is closely related to the satisfaction of psychological needs, which are conditions for well-being (19). Therefore, early positive experiences may predict positive emotions and mental health. This premise underpins the model we proposed in this study.

In addition, happiness or subjective well-being is an important concept of the positive psychology that aims to identify factors that promote and maximize individual mental health (20). The expanding literature supported that happiness had a relationship with social support (21), resilience (22), life satisfaction and subsequently better mental health (23). Positive childhood experiences had positive effects on happiness

(24). Additionally, satisfying psychological needs was positively associated with happiness (25). Thus, it can be posited that these experiences will increase happiness and impact mental health positively. There are also studies regarding the negative effects of adverse childhood experiences on happiness (26). For example, a recent study in Türkiye showed that the happiness levels of individuals who experienced various traumatic experiences and emotional neglect in childhood decreased. Unfortunately, childhood traumas continued to affect some participants into adulthood (27). Furthermore, some studies provided evidence the mediating effect of happiness. In Sood (28) study, happiness mediated the association between resilience and mental health suggesting that resilient university students who were happy were likely to experience better mental health. Another study showed that happiness mediated the association between psychological distress and life satisfaction (29).

Social media use has become widespread among young people. However, the excessive use of social media may lead to addiction. Accordingly, it is thought that investigating the factors associated with social media addiction is essential, especially within the scope of prevention studies. In addition, as we mentioned above, researchers have highlighted that possessing favorable memories in childhood is associated with higher positive emotions and less behavioral addictions. Although these variables were examined separately, this study is the first to examine the mediating role of happiness in the effects of positive childhood experiences on social media addiction. We suggest that happiness may mediate the association of positive childhood experiences with social media addiction. To facilitate this aim, we aimed to investigate whether positive childhood experiences predicted happiness and social media addiction, whether happiness predicted social media addiction and whether happiness mediated the relationship between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction.

Method

Participants

413 Turkish young adults participated in this study. The age range of the participants was 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 25.73 years ($SD=4.77$). 53.0% of the participants ($N=219$) were female and 47.0% were male ($N=194$). 265 participants were married (64.2%) and 148 participants were single (35.8%). The average social media usage time of the participants was 3.02 ($SD=1.68$).

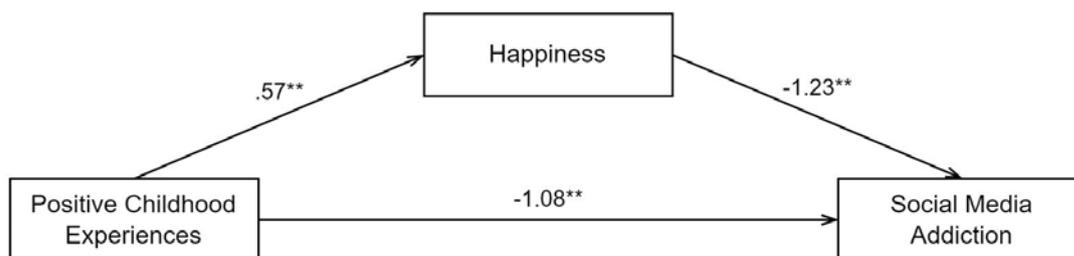


Figure 1. Structural model regarding the associations between the variables

Procedure

We created an online survey in Google Form format to collect data. The aim of the study, participants' right to withdraw from the survey during or after participation, the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information and the consent form were included in the first page of the online survey. After participants agreed to the informed consent, voluntary participants were allowed to access the questionnaires. No interviews were conducted with the participants to diagnose mental disorders. The ethics committee of Agri Ibrahim Cecen University approved this study (Ethics Code: 83965).

Measures

Positive Childhood Experiences Scale

The scale was developed by Bethell, Jones (30) and adopted by Çiçek and Çeri (31) to assess the individuals' positive experiences before the age of 18. The measurement tool is one-dimensional scale with 7 items. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=never to 5=always. An example item is "How often were you able to talk about your feelings with your family?". Higher scores indicate that individuals had more positive experiences during childhood. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was obtained as .78. For this study, it was obtained as .90.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire short form

Hills and Argyle (32) developed the scale and Doğan and Çötök (33) adopted into Turkish culture. The scale, which consists of 7 items, is one-dimensional and rated on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). An example item is "I don't have happy memories of the past". High scores show high happiness levels. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .74. For this study, it was obtained as .89.

Social Media Addiction Scale - Adult Form

Şahin and Yağcı (34) developed the scale to determine the social media addictions levels of adults aged 18-60. The 20-item scale consists of two subscales: virtual tolerance and virtual communication. The measurement tool is scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= not at all suitable to 5= very suitable. An example item is "I sometimes neglect family members because of social media". Higher scores indicate higher levels of social media addiction. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was calculated as .94. For this study, it was obtained as .96.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed with IBM SPSS 27 and the PROCESS macro v4.2 developed by Hayes (35). Preliminary analyses were conducted including mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, and Pearson correlation coefficients for each study variable. Skewness and kurtosis scores were determined to test the normality assumption. Tabachnick, Fidell (36) stated that normal distribution is accepted if the kurtosis and skewness coefficients are between +1.5 and -1.5. Mediation analysis (model 4) was performed to examine how happiness mediates the relationship between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction (Figure 1). We used 10,000 bootstraps to investigate the indirect effect of the mediator. According to Hayes (35), if the confidence intervals do not include zero, the indirect effect is statistically significant.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis, and correlations.

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Correlation		
					1	2	3
1. Positive Childhood Experiences	21.26	7.12	-.03	-.82	-		
2. Happiness	21.64	6.84	-.06	-.62	.59**	-	
3. Social Media Addiction	58.16	19.53	.04	-.57	-.65**	-.66**	-

M = mean, SD = standard deviations, **p < 0.001.

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis values, and correlations between the study variables. The results of the preliminary analysis showed that skewness values ranged between -0.06 and 0.04, and kurtosis values ranged between -0.82 and -0.57 which confirmed the normality assumption value ranges. Further, correlation analysis revealed that positive childhood experiences were positively

correlated with happiness ($r = .59$, $p < .001$) and negatively correlated with social media addiction ($r = -.65$, $p < .001$). Happiness was negatively correlated with social media addiction ($r = -.66$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Coefficients for the mediation model

Antecedent		Consequent										
		M (Happiness)					Y (Social Media Addiction)					
		β^0	β^1	SE	t	p		β^0	β^1	SE	t	p
X (Positive Childhood Experiences)	a_1	.59	.57	.03	15.11	.00	c'	-.39	-1.08	.11	-9.55	.00
M (Happiness)			-	-	-	-	b_1	-.43	-1.23	.11	-10.39	.00
Constant	i_{M1}		9.43	.85	11.06	.00	i_y		107.91	2.32	46.33	.00
		$R^2 = .35$					$R^2 = .54$					
		$F = 228.50$; $p < .001$					$F = 247.60$; $p < .001$					

β^0 : Standardized coefficients; β^1 : Unstandardized coefficients; SE: Standard Error; R^2 : Explained variance

Mediation analysis with a 10.000 bootstrapping resampling procedure was performed to investigate how happiness contributed to the relationship between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction. Table 2 shows the mediation analyses results. The findings showed that positive childhood experiences significantly predicted happiness ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 35% of the variance in happiness. Social media addiction was significantly predicted by happiness ($\beta = -1.23$, $p < 0.001$). Positive childhood experiences and happiness significantly predicted social media addiction by explaining 54% of the variance in social media addiction. Further, positive childhood experiences had indirect effects on social media addiction through happiness (effect = -0.70 , SE = 0.12 , $[-0.97, -0.42]$). This result indicate that happiness partially mediated the association between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction.

Discussion

Positive childhood experiences are associated with positive parenting, such as support, sensitivity, parental warmth, parent-child attachment, and effective relationships with friends in the community (30). In addition, one of the indicators of good mental health is happiness, and happiness can be considered as a protective factor for addictions. Shedding light on this mediation may deepen the understanding of the role of happiness in this relationship.

The present study results showed that positive childhood experiences positively predicted happiness and negatively predicted social media addiction. Participants with positive experiences in childhood reported high happiness and low social media addiction. The findings are consisted with previous studies in the literature. For example, in Batcho, Nave (24) study, favorable impressions of childhood led to positive consequences such as personal continuity, social connectedness, and health-promoting behaviors, whereas adverse impressions led to adverse consequences such as unsatisfactory relationships, discontinuity, and distress. Social experiences, rather than solitary experiences, were more closely associated with happiness. Shaw, Hansen (37) study concluded that positive childhood experiences supported the development of mental toughness and enhanced well-being, whereas another study revealed that adverse childhood experiences had positive associations with depression and lower subjective well-being (38). On the other hand, individuals exposed to conflict and violence experienced the poor quality of adult relationships (39). Unhealthy family functioning, interpersonal dysfunction, and poor adult relationship quality were linked to social media addiction (40). Childhood maltreatment may have triggered significant symptomatology as it accumulated over time (6).

The findings of the study showed that happiness negatively associated with social media addiction. Similar to our results, a study with Turkish university students revealed that there was a negative relationship

between happiness and social media addiction (41). In another study, subjective well-being had significant effects on both internet addiction and social media addiction (42). Similarly, the lower level of subjective well-being contributed to higher levels of behavioral problems such as social network sites addiction (43). In Cıplak (44) study, happiness negatively predicted social media addiction whereas narcissism and the average time spent on social media positively predicted this addiction. These results show that happy individuals are less likely to become addicted to social media. However, Phu and Gow (45) study showed that more persistent usage of Facebook was a significant predictor of higher levels of loneliness, whereas the number of Facebook friends was associated with happiness. These results indicate that social media use may have positive and negative consequences and the underlying mechanism of study variables needs to be further investigated.

The most important finding of this study was that happiness mediated the association between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction. In other words, participants who had positive experiences in childhood reported higher levels of happiness, which in turn were related to less social media addiction. Previous research provided evidence supporting the role of happiness in alleviating behavioral addictions. For example, life satisfaction, which is one of the indicators of subjective well-being, acted as a mediator in the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and excessive use of technology (internet and smartphone) (46). In Demir's research with adolescents, happiness mitigated the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences on social media addiction (7). In McLafferty, O'Neill (47) study, individuals who experienced childhood adversities reported poor social networks including family and friend support and family harmony, which in turn led to increased psychopathology. Indeed, childhood adversity was associated with the symptoms of psychological distress and less subjective well-being (48). From these studies, we can infer that positive perceived childhood experiences may lead individuals to experience positive emotions such as happiness in the future, which may reduce the risk of behavioral addictions.

An abundance of positive childhood experiences which may result in secure attachment may influence rational social media use. The systematic review study showed that insecure attachment (anxious and avoidant) may lead to more intensive and dysfunctional use of the internet and social media (49). These individuals may use social media sites as a way to compensate for the missing affection from the individual's family and peers. On the other hand, exposure to adverse childhood experiences increase the risk for a wide array of addictions and mental health problems (50). In addition, growing literature provided evidence the protective effects of positive childhood experiences for mental health problems in adulthood (51). Thus, to determine protective factors related to social media addiction is essential to healthy development of individuals. In this study, we found that happiness may mitigate the adverse effects of social media addiction. In this regard, psychological counselors may integrate positive psychology-based procedures into their practices that will increase the happiness levels and subsequently well-being of individuals with high social media addiction.

Although the findings of this study are novel and contribute significantly to previous literature, it is important to interpret the results within some limitations. First, the sample of the study consisted of young adults between the ages of 18-35. This jeopardizes the generalization of the results to the general population. Researchers should conduct this study with different sample groups such as adolescents, middle-aged adults, and older adults. Second, the cross-sectional design of this study does not allow us to suggest causal relationships among the study variables. Future studies may utilize the longitudinal framework to investigate the long-term relationship of positive childhood experiences with happiness and social media addiction. Third, the data were collected with self-report measures. Subsequent research may utilize objective measures to investigate the relationship between the study variables. Finally, no interviews were conducted regarding the mental states of the participants. Future studies may also include participants' mental states.

In conclusion, Addressing early life experiences and determining the factors affecting social media addiction are important for healthy development and lifelong health (30). This research focused mainly on the protective effects of positive childhood experiences and happiness on social media addiction. Focusing on person's strengths rather than psychological disorders is noteworthy for protective and preventive mental

health services. In line with previous studies, we confirmed that positive childhood experiences were positively and negatively associated with happiness and social media addiction, respectively. This study results also offered support for the link between positive childhood experiences and social media addiction, suggesting that having positive childhood experiences increases happiness levels which in turn reduces the levels of social media addiction. There may be deep-rooted problems in the lives of addicted individuals that reduce their life satisfaction and happiness and cause their dependence on internet technologies to continue or increase. This study determined that one of these problems may be the lack of positive childhood experiences and happiness. This result may offer indications on how to prevent the excessive social media usage in more efficient and effective ways.

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Yazar Katkıları: Tüm yazarlar ICMJE'in bir yazarda bulunmasını önerdiği tüm ölçütleri karşılamışlardır
Etik Onay: Bu çalışma için ilgili Etik Kuruldan etik onay alınmıştır.
Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.
Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmişlerdir.
Finansal Destek: Yazarlar finansal destek beyan etmemişlerdir.
Author Contributions: All authors met criteria recommended by ICMJE for being an author
Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was obtained for this study from relevant Ethics Committee.
Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
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