



Psychological Resilience Mediates the Relationship Between BCE's and Life Satisfaction: Examining Turkish Students

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Abstract

Research indicates that when examining later adulthood well-being, it is essential to consider not only the absence of adverse childhood experiences but also the presence of positive ones. This research aims to examine the relationship between benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs), psychological resilience, and life satisfaction in young adults. We collected data from 446 participants from 21 universities across Turkey via online forms. Participants self-reported their BCEs, life satisfaction, and psychological resilience. Structural equation modeling is used to test the study hypotheses. Results indicate that resilience plays a mediating role in the relationship between BCEs and life satisfaction (indirect effect = .011, 95% CI [.0039, .0210]). Considering the findings, we recommend assessing BCEs and psychological resilience along with adverse childhood experiences to monitor later adulthood well-being in students.

Keywords Benevolent childhood experiences · Life satisfaction · Psychological resilience · Students

Introduction

With the ongoing financial crises in the Turkish economy, young adults are now facing a rather gloomy picture ahead of them and are preoccupied with anxiety stemming from uncertainties (İstanbul Ekonomi Araştırma, 2021). Lack

of employment opportunities, the Covid-19 pandemic and related measures (school and workplace closures, travel restrictions), increasing living costs, and recent developments nearby Syria and Ukraine increased feelings of insecurity and despair among youth. Depression (Buffel et al., 2022), anxiety (Buyukkececi, 2021), and feeling hopeless are on the rise among the Turkish population affecting mostly young adults (Hacimusalar et al., 2020).

Public Relevance Understanding the positive experiences from childhood, like kindness and support, and how they relate to our happiness later in life can help us create better ways to support young people's well-being.

Key Findings The research explores the link between benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs), psychological resilience, and life satisfaction in young adults, drawing data from 446 participants across 21 Turkish universities. Structural equation modeling reveals that psychological resilience mediates the relationship between BCEs and life satisfaction (indirect effect = .011, 95% CI [.0039, .0210]), highlighting the importance of assessing BCEs and resilience alongside adverse childhood experiences for monitoring later adulthood well-being, particularly among students.

Although the global pandemic and economic strains coming with it are beyond one's capacity to handle, one of the protective factors from stressors and their effects is psychological resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013). When facing adversity, psychological resilience could help people to adapt to new circumstances and to cope with stressful events. Psychological resilience is related to many factors including positive childhood experiences (Doom et al., 2021). Benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) are also known to have deep impacts on later adulthood mental health and well-being (Merrick & Narayan, 2020).

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BCEs

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While it is crucial to minimize negative life experiences and traumas during childhood and adolescence, fostering positive emotions and experiences is equally important for

psychological well-being and resilience. Benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) serve as resilience-promoting factors against later mental health issues, including having a stable caregiver, close friends, home routine, and social support (Bethell et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018). Positive experiences act as resources that significantly predict psychological resilience and life satisfaction (Cohn et al., 2009), with potential intergenerational positive effects (Han et al., 2023).

While adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have received extensive attention, BCEs have gained recent recognition in positive psychology. Research indicates that considering not only the absence of ACEs but also BCEs is vital for understanding later adulthood mental health (Merrick & Narayan, 2020). BCEs can provide valuable insights into individuals' health history and inform interventions for those with ACEs. In later adulthood, BCEs are associated with reduced stress, sadness, psychopathology, and higher life satisfaction (Bethell et al., 2019; Gunay-Oge et al., 2020a). Promotive factors observed in studies independent of ACEs underscore the direct impact of BCEs on adult life indicators (Han et al., 2023). However, ACEs and childhood maltreatment are linked to later-life depression (Abdul Kadir & Desa, 2013).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a method of thinking that emphasizes an individual's strengths rather than their flaws, as well as the power of solution rather than the anxiety surrounding them. Experiences such as life satisfaction and fulfillment; positive personal characteristics such as psychological resilience; and flourishing relationships such as BCEs, friendship, and collegiality are all part of the positive psychology framework (Dekel & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2015). Positive connections and qualities can grow and be expressed within pleasant groups and institutions, which leads to positive subjective experiences and fulfillment (Seligman, 2011). Similar goals in enhancing human potential and individual welfare are recognized by positive psychology and social work strengths perspectives (Dekel & Taubman-Ben-Ari, 2015).

Psychological Resilience

The capacity to bounce back from adversity, such as stress, disease, or psychological issues, is defined as psychological resilience (Smith et al., 2008). Masten (2014) defines resilience in a broader context as "the capacity of a system to successfully adapt to disturbances that threaten its viability, function or development." Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) argue that resilience is associated with two concepts: adversity

and adaptation, and it is a strength-based approach to stress. People with strong psychological resilience may cope better with stressful events and even thrive in the face of adversities. Resilience differs from coping and recovering. Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) state that resilience is having resources to cope with stressful events whereas coping is having strategies employed for such events. Similarly, recovery is a temporary state and is used for specific instances especially for illness while resilience is more of a lifelong capacity or quality for general events. Recent studies on resilience (Masten, 2021; Cicchetti, 2013) show that there is an understanding that resilience develops based on relational developmental systems (cultural, social, genetic, neurobiology, childhood, family characteristics). Positivity, determination, maturity, and having strong social support networks are considered resilience qualities (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Although there are other approaches and measures to assess and define resilience, we focused on the stress-based construct (Smith et al., 2008) since numerous studies linked childhood experiences and stress-based resilience in adulthood (Kocatürk & Çiçek, 2021). Resilience and coping were shown to be positively correlated in research done with social work students in India (Stanley et al., 2016). Research on resilience in the Turkish population suggests that resilience is associated with less hopelessness and depression (Alnıçık et al., 2021; Çelik et al., 2017) and linked with more life satisfaction (Karagöz et al., 2021; Temiz & Cömert, 2018). As Merrick and Narayan (2020) suggested, there is a need for research examining how BCEs differ in various populations across the world and how they impact resilience. In this study, we examined the association between BCEs and life satisfaction, as well as the mediating effects of psychological resilience. We propose that BCEs may positively contribute to psychological resilience, which in turn improves life satisfaction.

Psychological Resilience as a Mediator

Studies have shown a connection between BCEs and life satisfaction. According to Temiz and Cömert (2018), psychological resilience significantly influences Turkish university students' life satisfaction. Students having higher psychological resilience were found to have more life satisfaction in their study. In their study of psychological resiliency and life happiness in healthcare workers, Karagöz et al. (2021) found that resilience strongly predicted life satisfaction. In another study, Spanish psychology students' resilience and life satisfaction were found to be significantly positively correlated (Limonero et al., 2012). A sequential mediation of social support and psychological resilience in the association between stress and life satisfaction was demonstrated by Yang et al. (2018).

In their study, Gao et al. (2019) demonstrated the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between negative experiences and positive social adjustment. Although research on BCEs is limited in terms of mediation analysis, some studies indicate the mediating role of resilience between BCEs and other components of life quality. For example, Ashour et al. (2024) found that sleep quality is related to ACEs and BCEs and the relationship is mediated by resilience.

However, our primary objective was to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which BCEs exert their influence on life satisfaction. Resilience, being a psychological function, assumes a pivotal role in an individual's capacity to effectively adapt to stressors and adversities, and it is frequently intertwined with positive well-being outcomes. Thus, our working hypothesis was that psychological resilience may operate as a mediating link between BCEs and life satisfaction.

While young adults cannot change their positive or negative childhood experiences, evidence highlighting the mediating role of psychological resilience between BCEs and quality of life suggests that supporting resilience can enhance overall well-being. There is an established link between BCEs and resilience and a strong link between psychological resilience and positive mental health outcomes; it is hypothesized that having strong psychological resilience will serve as a mediator, translating the impact of BCEs into higher life satisfaction. This hypothesis aligns with the theoretical assumption that resilience acts as a mechanism through which BCEs influence later-life satisfaction.

The Current Study

To our knowledge, little is known about psychological resilience, positive benevolent childhood experiences, and life satisfaction among young adults. In this timely research, we want to investigate if young adults' (18–30) BCEs predict life satisfaction and if psychological resilience plays a mediating role between them.

To explore the role of psychological resilience in the link between BCEs and life satisfaction among students, we developed the following hypotheses:

H1: BCEs will positively correlate with psychological resilience in young adults.

BCEs are expected to contribute to the development of psychological resilience.

H2: Psychological resilience will mediate the relationship between BCEs and life satisfaction in young adults.

Method

Using an online survey form, we collected 446 data from social work university students across Turkey from 21 universities. Participants were mostly women (87%). This homogeneity was expected as most social work students are female according to Turkish university statistics (The Council of Higher Education, 2022). Ethics committee approval was obtained from Suleyman Demirel University Ethics Committee.

No information on their grade was collected due to a relatively large representative and homogenous sample. The data collection lasted 2 months (February–March 2022). The online questionnaire included questions about the university and gender along with the BCEs, life satisfaction, and resilience. The form was composed of 34 questions, and it took 12–15 min to fill in. No credit or payment was given to participants in exchange for their participation. The data analysis was done using the Process SPSS Macro program. Model 6 and bootstrapping (5000) methods were used for serial multiple mediation analysis (Hayes, 2022).

Measures

Life Satisfaction

Diener and colleagues developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (1985). It is a commonly used scale to assess one's level of subjective satisfaction with their life. It is a single-factor 5-item scale with a response range of 7 (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree). Dağlı and Baysal conducted the scale's Turkish adaption (2016). The scale was changed to include a response range of 1–5 for the Turkish version. A sample item is "The conditions of my life are excellent." Participants could get at least 5 and at most 25 points from the life satisfaction scale. Scale mean scores were calculated to be used in the analyses. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as 0.82. ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.774$, range = 1–5).

Benevolent Childhood Experiences

The BCE measure is a ten-item questionnaire of positive childhood experiences from age 0 to 18 (Narayan et al., 2018). Items address various areas of childhood life such as comforting beliefs, stable trustworthy caregivers, and predictable home routines. Turkish adaptation was conducted by Gunay-Oge et al. (2020b). Test scores range from 1 (absence) and 2 (presence). A sample item is "Growing up I have a predictable home routine, like regular meals and

a regular bedtime.” Scale mean scores were calculated to be used in the analyses. Positively rated items were added together for a total BCE score ($M = 1.756$, $SD = 2.10$, $\text{range} = 1-2$).

The Brief Resilience Scale

The short resilience scale was created by Smith et al. (2008) to evaluate a person’s ability to deal with risks and difficulties for a lifetime. Doğan (2015) adapted the scale to Turkish, and reliability and validity tests were conducted. The scale is one-dimensional and consists of six items. Explanatory and linear factor analyses of the items were performed in the adaptation study. There is a 5-point Likert-type response key for the scale. The six questions on the 5-point Likert-type scale provide response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale mean score was taken into account for statistical analyses. High scores signify an elevated degree of psychological resilience inside the person. The item loads of the scale were found to be between 0.63 and 0.79. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.83. ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.815$, $\text{range} = 1-5$). A sample item is “I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.”

The hypothesized model is presented in Fig. 1.

Results

We used SPSS statistics 25.0, Macro Process package, and Amos 25.0 programs to run data analysis. Descriptive (independent samples *t*-test), correlation, regression, confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS), and serial multiple mediation (Model 6) analyses were performed (Hayes, 2022).

Through an online form, we collected 446 surveys during the data collection phase. Out of 446, the majority were female (87%) as most social work students in Turkey are (The Council of Higher Education, 2022). Social work students from 21 universities participated in the research

throughout Turkey and the mean age was 22. We did not find any differences in the mean scores of male and female students, except for BCEs ($t = 2.384$, $p = 0.005$, $CI [0.127, 1.32]$). The BCEs of female students were considerably greater than those of male students. Moreover, we found no difference between different age groups in all constructs.

Table 1 highlights the mean values, standard deviations, and correlation values of the variables examined in the study.

To test the hypothesis, regression analysis based on the bootstrap approach was utilized (Hayes, 2022). IBM SPSS Macro program was used to test the mediation effect (Hayes & Matthes, 2009), and to run confirmatory factor analysis, we used Amos 25.0 program. First, we tested the measurement model’s fit. After examining the fit, we tested a structural model. The results of the confirmatory analysis showed good fit (CFA (CMIN/df = 1.63; GFI = 0.90; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.03). The latent variable structural model was used to test hypotheses following the validation of the measurement model.

Results supported all our hypotheses and showed that BCEs were a positive predictor of psychological resilience ($B = 0.076$, $S.E = 0.018$, $p < 0.001$) and life satisfaction ($B = 0.094$, $S.E = 0.015$, $p < 0.001$).

We calculated the indirect effects using the bootstrapping method (5000) with 95% confidence intervals. Mediation analysis revealed that the pathway “BCEs → psychological resilience → life satisfaction” (indirect effect = 0.011, 95% CI [0.0039, 0.0210]) was significant.

Discussion

This study found that psychological resilience mediated the effect of benevolent childhood experiences on life satisfaction. If the participants had higher BCEs, they demonstrated stronger psychological resilience which in turn leads to more satisfaction in life. Despite ongoing economic (inflation and devaluation) and societal problems (i.e., migration) in Turkish society, students showed psychological resilience.



Fig. 1 Hypothesized model. Note: These values represent unstandardized path coefficients in the model for the first study. ***Significant, $p < .001$

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and relations between variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	Max	Min	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. BCEs	1.75	2	1	2.10	-1.00	.651	(.68)		
2. Life satisfaction	2.76	5	1	.77	-.064	-.263	.37**	(.82)	
3. Resilience	2.90	5	1	.81	-.60	-.065	.19**	.30**	(.83)

** $p < 0.001$, Cronbach’s alphas are in parentheses

Participants report that they have predominantly BCEs. Moreover, results show that females had more BCEs than males and this may imply that although cultural practices vary within Turkey, the cultural norms in which child-rearing practices may differ by the gender of the child (Dinn & Sunar, 2017). Other scores did not significantly differ by gender. Our study provides valuable insights into the mediating role of psychological resilience in the relationship between benevolent childhood experiences and life satisfaction. The demonstrated resilience among students in the face of economic and societal challenges underscores the importance of positive childhood experiences in fostering adaptive functioning and overall life satisfaction.

Another finding we wanted to highlight was that BCEs are an important predictor of later young adulthood life satisfaction. These findings are supported by previous research. For example, Booth et al. (2015) found that university students in the UK who had BCEs reported better levels of life satisfaction. Conducting similar research, Doğan and Aydın (2021) found that BCEs significantly predict life satisfaction in a Turkish sample. Han et al. (2023) showed in their systematic analysis that BCEs are associated with promotive factors in later adult life including higher life satisfaction. Günay-Öge (2020a) also found BCEs are positively associated with life satisfaction in later adulthood in a Turkish sample. Our study aligns with and contributes to a growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of benevolent childhood experiences as significant predictors of life satisfaction in young adulthood. The consistency of these findings across different cultural contexts underscores the universal impact of positive childhood experiences on individuals' well-being.

Moreover, we found that benevolent childhood experiences predict psychological resilience. According to the approach that considers resilience in the context of inter-systemic relationships (Masten, 2021; Cicchetti, 2013), positive childhood experiences can support resilience. Studies found strong links between both BCEs and ACEs and resilience in adulthood (Kelifa et al., 2020). BCEs are a significant predictor of psychological resilience (Kocatürk & Çiçek, 2021) and life satisfaction and ensure that individuals have protective psychological resources. These results underscore the significance of enhancing positive experiences in early childhood as a preventive measure against various adverse outcomes in adulthood. Another study analyzed 4006 patients in primary care clinics and showed that high psychological resilience operates as a buffer to reduce ACE rates and depression in those who had negative childhood experiences (Poole et al., 2017). Sege et al. (2017) found that BCEs are effective psychological resilience-promoting factors in high-risk children with negative childhood experiences. Psychological resilience may help students develop

better coping skills in stressful situations, thus leading to better life satisfaction. This study showed that young adults have predominantly high BCEs, strong psychological resilience, and life satisfaction. Students' strong psychological resilience mediated the relationship between BCEs and life satisfaction emphasizing the role of psychological resilience in this relationship. This study is the first one to investigate this relationship in Turkish university students to our knowledge. As a result, we propose that psychological resilience could be considered or improved in young adults for better life satisfaction. BCEs are more concerning for male students than females, but the Turkish sample shows predominantly positive experiences. Finally, interventions could be designed to equip students with skills and values to have psychological resilience.

The accumulated evidence from various studies suggests a consistent and positive relationship between BCEs and psychological resilience. In sum, our research significantly contributes to the scholarly landscape by extending the cultural and mediating factors considered in the BCEs-life satisfaction relationship and shedding light on the role of psychological resilience in this interplay. This understanding has practical implications for the development of culturally sensitive interventions and programs aimed at enhancing life satisfaction and well-being. These findings not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge but also underscore the importance of interventions aimed at promoting BCEs for long-term psychological well-being.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite a relatively large dataset for the population of this research, the results could be replicated in different universities before generalizing about students in Turkey. It is a cross-sectional study and there is a need to conduct a follow-up study to see the long-lasting effects of BCEs in any given population. Apart from gender and age, any other related demographic information such as ethnicity, and family size could be collected. Turkish culture and childhood experiences and upbringing practices vastly differ in terms of ethnicity and family size. More research examining the relationship between BCEs and young adulthood well-being using cross-cultural and larger samples could further validate the effect of childhood resources. Results could also be supported by qualitative data and analysis to see how BCEs are effective in detail.

Author Contribution Melih Sever: conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft and revisions. Oktay Tatlıcıoğlu: writing—original draft, data collection, formal analysis.

Data Availability The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate Necessary ethical committee approval was granted for this study. Participants voluntarily agreed to take part and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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