

# How do Adolescents Increase Their Subjective Well-Being By Means of Establishing Relationships with Their Parents?

Ali Eryılmaz<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assist. Prof. Dr., Osmangazi University School of  
Education, Eskişehir - Turkey

## ABSTRACT

How do adolescents increase their subjective well-being by means of establishing relationships with their parents?

**Purpose:** In this study, investigation of how adolescents increase their subjective well-being by means of establishing relationships with their parents is aimed.

**Method:** This study had two study groups, namely, the primary and main groups. The primary participants of the study included a total of 360 adolescents (202 male and 158 female), aged between 14 and 17. The main study group included a total of 90 adolescents (45 male and 45 female). The study data were obtained by using the Adolescents' Subjective Well-Being Scale and open ended questions. The data were analyzed by using the content analysis method with respect to sentences.

**Results:** Study findings indicated that parents increase adolescents' subjective well-being levels by means of participating in activities together, caring for them, supporting their perceived control and autonomy, showing them permissive and democratic parent attitudes, governing family together, having positive communication, and also establishing family unity.

**Discussion and Conclusions:** The findings of the study suggest that there are nine parent oriented factors for increasing adolescents' subjective well-being. Results of this study may be used for improving subjective well being program.

**Key words:** Adolescent, subjective well-being, family relationships

## ÖZET

Ergenler öznel iyi oluşlarını anne ve babaları ile ilişki kurmak aracılığıyla nasıl yükseltmektedirler?

**Amaç:** Bu çalışmada, ergenlerin öznel iyi oluşlarını aile ile ilişki aracılığı ile nasıl yükselttiklerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

**Yöntem:** Bu çalışmada, ön ve asıl çalışma grubu olmak üzere, iki çalışma grubu yer almaktadır. Ön çalışma grubuna, 2010-2011 Eğitim-Öğretim Yılında, Ankara'da lise öğrenimine devam eden, 14 ile 17 yaşları arasındaki 158 kız (%43.9) ve 202 erkek (%56.1) olmak üzere, toplam 360 ergen katılmıştır. Asıl çalışma grubunda ise, toplam 90 ergen (45 kız, 45 erkek) yer almıştır. Çalışmada, Ergen Öznel İyi Oluş Ölçeği ve açık uçlu soru formu kullanılmıştır. Veriler, cümle bazında içerik analizi tekniğiyle analiz edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Çalışmada, ailelerin ergenlerle ilgilenmeleri, onların algılanan kontrollerini desteklemeleri, ergenlerle olumlu iletişimde bulunmaları, ergenlere karşı demokratik ve izin verici ana-baba tutumu içerisinde olmaları, ailede birliği oluşturmaları, ergenlerin özerkliğini desteklemeleri, ergenleri ailede yönetime katmaları, ergenlerle birlikte etkinlik yapmaları ile ergenlerin öznel iyi oluşlarını yükselttikleri sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Sonuç ve Tartışma:** Bu çalışmada, anne ve babaların dokuz farklı araçla ergenlerin öznel iyi oluşlarını yükselttikleri bulunmuştur. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, öznel iyi oluşu artırma programlarında kullanılabilir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ergen, öznel iyi oluş, aile ile ilişkiler

Address reprint requests to:  
Assist. Prof. Dr. Ali Eryılmaz  
Osmangazi University School of Education  
26100, Eskişehir - Turkey

Phone: +90-222-339-3750

Fax: +90-222-229-3124

Email address:  
erall76@hotmail.com

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## INTRODUCTION

Most of the people would like to spend their lives happily (1). Individuals live with a happy future expectation (2). Happiness issue which is so important is expressed as subjective well-being concept in psychology. Subjective well-being is a concept consisting of experiencing negative feelings less and positive

feelings more and getting high level of satisfaction from life (3). Subjective well-being represents positive side of people's mental health (mental healthiness is maturity, adaptation to life and feeling well subjectively) (4). Subjective well-being is considered as an important criterion to monitor, evaluation and treatment of mental health of individuals (5).

Subjective well-being issue is important for

adolescents as well as children, adults and elderly to spend life healthily. One of the most important factors affecting subjective well-being of individuals is their relations with their environment (6). Adolescents continue their autonomous development by gaining independence psychologically from their families but also being connected with their parents during adolescence (7). Moreover, family environment of the adolescent is one of the most important sources of subjective well-being (8).

Family has an important impact on mental health of adolescent. There is evidence and information in the literature that family has an impact on mental health of adolescent in two ways. First, mental health of adolescent is being affected by family. For example, some of the children of parents who use oppressive control methods on adolescents frequently quarrel with them and are not interested on them are inclined to substance dependence and show antisocial personality patterns (9). However, family affects mental health of the adolescent positively as well. For example, parents contribute to development of self-confidence by providing emotional support and social acceptance (10).

There are factors affecting subjective well-beings of adolescents both as results and processes as well. For example, several factors such as intelligence, academic success, personality characteristics, control focus and self-esteem, peer relations, school satisfaction and somatic factors (11,12) affect subjective well-beings of adolescents as result and process variables. On the other hand, there are studies in the literature examining the relations between several variables such as family structure, family environment and family functionality as result variable and subjective well-beings of adolescents (8). Despite these, there is not adequate data in the literature about how parents affect subjective well-beings of adolescents positively as a process variable. Qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to evaluate the contribution of parental factor to subjective well-beings of adolescents as both process and result variables. Findings on this issue may provide concrete behavioral indicators to professionals giving both psychological and psychiatric help to adolescents. Moreover, information obtained about this issue may

both be used for healthy development of adolescents and their disease prevention and treatment. In conclusion, we aimed to “investigate how adolescents increase their subjective well-beings by relations with their families” in this study.

## METHODS

This study was conducted in quantitative and qualitative research model. Data were collected from individuals at different ages and cross-sectional research method was used. In the study, “investigation of how adolescents increase their subjective well-beings by relations with their families” was aimed. For this purpose, qualitative data were collected by “data collection by interviewer opinion” method which has been used in many studies of psychology. Data were analyzed by administering sentence-based content analysis technique to observational data obtained. Data were collected as individual administration in the study. Ethical principles were complied and volunteering was taken as the fundamental principle. Brief information about the purpose of the research was provided before administering the data collection tools. Following this, scales were given to participants volunteered to participate in the study. Additional information was given to participants when needed.

### Study Group

There are two sub-study groups in this study called preliminary and original study groups. The reason for this is to access adolescents who are highly satisfied with family relations. Information obtained from adolescents highly satisfied with family relations will serve better to the purpose of the study. Preliminary Study Group: 389 adolescents who were between 14 and 17 years old, high school students living in Ankara at 2010-2011 term were recruited to the study. After giving information about the study to these adolescents, 29 (11 girls, 18 boys) of them did not want to participate. In conclusion, 360 adolescents in total (158 girls [43.9%] and 202 boys [56.1%]) who were between 14 and 17 years old, high school students living in Ankara at

2010-2011 term participated in the study. Original Study Group: In the study, 130 adolescents whom family relations satisfaction scores were over average (mean=12.63) were selected out of group of 360 people whom adolescent subjective well-being scale was administered. In order to meet parametric conditions, a total of 90 adolescents from 14, 15 and 16 age groups each having 30 adolescents (15 girls and 15 boys) were randomly selected out of these 130 adolescents. Qualitative study was performed on selected adolescents.

### Assessment Tools

Personal Information Form, Qualitative Question Form and Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale were used in the study. Information about the assessment tool used is as follows:

Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale: Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale was developed by Eryilmaz (13). This scale consists of 15 items assessing satisfaction and positive emotions of adolescents at different areas of life. Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale contains four sub-factors as satisfaction in family relations, satisfaction from life, positive emotions and satisfaction in relations with important people. Reported variance of these four dimensions was 61.64. Cronbach alpha reliability value of the scale is 0.87, Spearman-Brown value is 0.83. Adjustment validity of the scale was assessed by Life Satisfaction Scale. Adolescent Subjective Well-Being Scale was found to be correlated with Life Satisfaction Scale at a level of 0.63 (10).

### Statistical Analysis

This study was conducted in descriptive survey model. Open-ended question of "How your family (mother and father) increase your happiness?" was asked to adolescents in the original study group. Sentence-based content analysis technique was administered to responses to this question. When data were being analyzed and findings were being categorized, information and findings from theoretical and practical studies about subjective well-being (8,9) were utilized.

## RESULTS

Sentence-based content analysis technique was administered to "How your family (mother and father) increase your happiness?" question. One hundred and seven sentences at 9 dimensions in total were obtained. In the first dimension after analysis, there were statements such as "I become happy as I do activities that I like together with my family". First dimension was named as "doing activities together" according to literature. In the second dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy when they are interested in us even though they have a lot of work to do". Second dimension was named as "dealing with adolescents" according to contents of sentences. In the third dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy and feel self-confident when they say that you can do, it is easy". Third dimension was named as "supporting perceived control" according to the literature. In the fourth dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy because I can share things I have done with them and they listen to me". Fourth dimension was named as "being positively communicated" according to contents of sentences. In the fifth dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy because they do what I want from them and I do what they want from me". Fifth dimension was named as "having a democratic parental attitude" according to the literature. In the sixth dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy when they do what I want and first thing I want from them". Sixth dimension was named as "having a permissive parental attitude" according to contents of sentences. In the seventh dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy when they do not take my problems as unimportant and do not say that "is this problem?". Seventh dimension was named as "unity in family" according to the literature. In the eighth dimension, there were statements such as "I become happy when my family request my opinion in case of a conflict" and "I become happy when they ask my plans about my future and education". Eighth dimension was named as "supporting autonomy" according to the literature. In the eighth dimension, there were statements such as "I

**Table 1: Results of content analysis**

Category	Sample sentences	Number	Percent
Doing activities together	I like doing an activity such as picnic together. I become happy when we go shopping or prepare breakfast together.	17	15.66%
Dealing with adolescents	I become happy when they are interested in us even though they have a lot of work to do. I become happy when they help my problems.	16	15.04%
Supporting perceived control	I become happy and feel self-confident when they say that you can do, it is easy. I become happy when they support me after I succeed in something.	15	14.1%
Being positively communicated	I become happy because I can share things I have done with them and they listen to me. I become happy when they tell me without hurting and shouting me when I want something from them even if they do not do what I wanted.	14	13.16%
Having a democratic parental attitude	I become happy because they do what I want from them and I do what they want from me. I become happy when they say that it does not suit me when I do something wrong.	14	13.16%
Having a permissive parental attitude	I become happy when they let me choose on my own. I become happy when they do what I want and first thing I want from them".	11	10.34%
Unity in family	I am happy to have love in family. I become happy when they do not take my problems as unimportant and do not say that "is this a problem"	9	8.36%
Supporting autonomy	I become happy when my family asks my opinion when there is a conflict. I become happy when they ask my plans about my future and education.	7	6.48%
Management in family	I become happy because we are doing activities such as going out and cleaning the house altogether. I become happy because we take decisions altogether.	4	3.70%
	<b>Total</b>	107	100%

become happy when we do activities such as going out and cleaning the house altogether". Ninth dimension was named as "adding adolescents to family management" according to the literature. Number of sentences and percentages on results of content analysis and sample sentences were shown in Table 1 (Table 1).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, how relations of adolescents with their families make their subjective well-beings more positive was examined. According to our findings, parents make subjective well-beings of adolescents more positive by nine important tools.

First dimension was named as doing activities together in this study. Activities were evaluated in context of goal theory of subjective well-being in the literature. According to this theory, behaviors performed to reach the goal and consequences of these behaviors make individuals better subjectively (14). In other words, the factor that make individuals' subjective well-beings more positive is transferring their purposeful activities to life. Our study findings supported the theoretical

explanation of goal theory at this point. However, it is not clear in these theoretical explanations whether these activities will be performed individually or in a group. This study contributed theoretical explanations of goal theory at this point as it denotes adolescents doing activities with their families in a group environment.

Second dimension was named as dealing with adolescents in this study. Family members should show adequate interest in each other in order to make family functional structurally in several family therapy theories (positive family therapy, family system therapy) as mentioned in the literature. While inadequate interest hinders developmental support of individuals, overinterest may cause symbiotic connections between family members (15), balanced interest is required for a healthy family structure. This study finding supports explanations of these family therapies. If parents show adequate interest to adolescents, then subjective well-beings of adolescents come to a more positive level.

Fourth, seventh and ninth dimensions (being positively communicated, unity in family, adding adolescents to family management) evaluated in this study are consistent with the findings of studies done

empirically in the literature. According to the result of the study done in this direction, subjective well-beings of adolescents become to a more positive level in proportion to being added to family management and creating positive communication with them (16). In another study, relationship between family environment and adolescent subjective well-being was examined. According to study results, unity but not control significantly increases subjective well-beings of adolescents (17). This study seems to support the findings of previous quantitative studies qualitatively.

Two dimensions of this study were named as having democratic and permissive parental attitude. In the literature about childcare practices, attitudes of parents towards their children were evaluated under topics such as democratic, authoritarian, protective and permissive (18). Being consistent, decisive and confident is important in child raising by 7 democratic attitude and parents having democratic attitudes permit their children to behave within certain limits. By this attitude of child raising, displaying and freely development of talents of the individual is made possible. In over-permissive families, there is no limitation and few discipline, sincere and unconditional support are provided and child has full freedom (18). Studies showed that children who were raised with a democratic and over-permissive attitude have high levels of self-esteem and show less depression (19). Both parental attitudes took place as two important dimensions in this study due to letting those experiencing positive emotions frequently and negative emotions rarely.

Our findings showed that when autonomies of adolescents are supported by their parents, adolescents feel themselves better subjectively. Autonomy is evaluated as an important psychological structure developing at adolescence in the literature. Adolescents develop their autonomies at this period by responses such as taking their own decisions and gaining independence from parents emotionally (20). According to self-determination theory, autonomy is one of the congenital psychological needs of the individual. Meeting this need make subjective well-beings of individuals to more positive position (21). Our study finding seems to be consistent with the literature for

showing the importance of supporting of autonomy of adolescents by their parents.

One of the dimensions of this study is supporting of perceived control. According to Skinner (22), perceived control is beliefs of the individual towards performing goal-oriented consequences and preventing undesired consequences. It was reported that when individuals believe that they can achieve the desired results, then they have personal control, perceived control or feeling of control. Skinner said that people around individuals encourage them to behave and thus make their perceived controls to a more positive position by giving support and confidence to them. According to studies, individuals with high level of perceived control are healthier both physically and mentally. There are studies in the literature which showed significant relations with subjective well-being and perceived control. For example, according to Grob (23), subjective well-being is having a positive attitude towards life. Attitude term used in this text consists of cognitive evaluations of individuals. According to Diener (24), subjective well-beings of individuals may be affected by their cognitive evaluations. At this point, perceived control represents their trusts to generate desired results (22). According to both Deiner and Grob, there are significant relations between perceived control which is an element of cognitive structure and subjective well-being. Third dimension in this study was named as supporting perceived control based on these information and findings.

## CONCLUSION

It seems important for adolescents in high schools doing activities with their families, being given interest by their families, supporting their perceived controls, communicating positively with them, having a democratic and permissive attitude to adolescents, unity in family and adding adolescents to family management to take their subjective well-beings to a more positive level.

Some recommendations may be developed by study findings. First of all, professionals delivering psychological help may get benefit from findings of this study. By considering the dimensions showed, they

may prepare programs to protect subjective well-beings of consultees and add families to this program process. Further studies evaluating relationship between both psychiatric diseases and their recovery processes and behaviors which families of adolescents perform in order to make subjective well-beings of individuals more positive may contribute to the literature from both theoretical and clinical practical points of view.

Main limitation of this study is performing it on adolescents having high school education and did not take any psychiatric diagnosis. Socio-economic level

has also not been taken as a variable. Further studies comparing behaviors of families of adolescents whom having or not having high school education and with or without psychiatric diagnosis in order to make subjective well-beings of adolescents may contribute to the literature. Furthermore, new studies can be performed by adding variables such as academic success and socio-economic level. This study has descriptive and qualitative characteristics. Significant relationship between variables may be detected by quantitative study methods in the future.

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