



ACADEMIC SUCCESS, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSIVENESS AS THE PREDICTORS OF LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG THE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Earlier research have denoted to a significant connection of life satisfaction with numerous aspects from the sphere of mental health, as well as with the academic achievement. The aim of this research was to determine the intensity and direction of connection between the mentioned variables. Special attention was given to the research of the connection between life satisfaction and academic success, as well as the prediction of life satisfaction based on the values of anxiety, depression and school achievements amongst the students. The sample consists of the students (N=321) from the University of Pristina located in Kosovska Mitrovica. The results have shown that life satisfaction is in statistically significant and positive correlation with the academic success ($r= 0.140$, $p< 0.05$), while being in a negative correlation with anxiety ($r= -0.342$, $p< 001$) and depressiveness ($r= -0.492$, $p< 001$). Likewise, there is a possibility to predict the life satisfaction based on the academic success, anxiety and depressiveness (the percent of explained variance is 27%). The results partly match the earlier findings in this area of research.

Key Words: Academic achievement, life satisfaction, anxiety, depressiveness, students.

INTRODUCTION

In the process of searching for health factors, the role and significance of positive psychology is unavoidable, as a relatively new psychological discipline which primarily focuses on positive experience, personality characteristics and conditions which enable the individual as well as the group, to develop and function in an adequate way. The representatives of positive psychology are trying to promote the factors which enable the individuals and communities to grow and develop (Rijavec, 2008), to be able to scientifically study human strength and happiness (Rijaves et al., 2008), emphasize the importance to organize a research, take various measures of prevention in order to protect and improve mental health. The most researched construct in the

sphere of positive psychology is the so-called 'biased well-being', which is considered to be one of the most important indicators of positive mental health (Jovanović i Novović, 2008). The biased well-being or human-welfare is a relatively new construct in psychology; it is considered a primary dimension of human experience (Kamman at al., 1984) and one of the three adaptable outcomes of stress , next to the social functioning of somatic health (Lazarus, 1991).

One of the newer constructs of positive psychology beside the common concepts (biased well-being, human welfare, happiness, life quality, the meaning of life etc.) is the construct of life satisfaction, which represents an integral part of a wider concept of biased well-being or welfare. Life satisfaction refers to the global evaluation of personal life (Penezić, 2006), it represents a component of an individuals' biased well-being (Božin, 1996) or part of happiness which is accordingly interpreted as a feeling of well-being, a complete and continuous individuals' satisfaction with life as well as the dominance of positive feelings (Kammann et al., 1984).

There is a disagreement among the researchers regarding the definition of life satisfaction construct. According to one of the definitions, life satisfaction concept presents a complete perception and evaluation of someone's life and is often being described as a cognitive component of a biased well-being, while the feeling of happiness represents an emotional component and is being described as a frequent feeling of positive emotions (Diener et al., 2002) and refers to the frequency of experiencing positive and negative emotions.

Life satisfaction is a subject of many researches ((Diener & Diener, 1995; Arslan et al., 2010), with various methodologies being used, while the interpretation of data presents a problem due to the lack of standards (Cummins, 1995). The research data in which the scales of well-being were analysed, show that the scales of well-being are differing only from the scales of stress (Kammann et al., 1984), while the scales of neuroticism, depression and anxiety have also measured well-being, in the positive part of their scale.

Various studies have been trying to link life satisfaction with numerous factors of physical and psychological functioning of the individual. According to Acton (Acton, 1994) and later on according to Argyle (Argyle, 1999), research were confirming the connection of life satisfaction with depression, mental health, self-perception, calmness, vitality, self-control, moral, health, self-respect, worries, stress, work satisfaction, marriage satisfaction, family satisfaction, happiness, parenting satisfaction, school success etc. On numerous occasions the connection between life satisfaction and some socio-demographic variables was confirmed, so Andrews and Withney (Andrews & Withney, 1976) have pointed out that different social-demographic variables can explain about 8% of a biased well-being variance. Some traits of personality have better predictability (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener et al., 2002). Costa and McCrae pointed that extroversion can interpret about 8% of biased well-being, while the neuroticism which is in a negative correlation with life satisfaction, can interpret about 27% of variance. The results of the research have also shown that there is a connection between the meaning of life and a proactive stress overcoming (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2004; Hutchinson et al., 2007), as well as between the meaning of life and self-respect (Ryff, 1989; Steger, 2006; Steger et al., 2006; Debats, 1996; Minić et al., 2010). Direct and significant connection has been confirmed to exist between the meaning of life and life satisfaction in numerous research studies (Bonebright et al., 2000; Chamberlain & Zika, 1988; Keyes et al., 2002; Ryff, 1989, Steger, 2006; Steger et al., 2006; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Casas and associates (Casas et al., 2004) offer the data about the existance of positive relation between life satisfaction and the sphere of general life satisfaction; as well as the data proving that life satisfaction is in positive correlation with the immaterial values among the adolescents included in the study (Casas et al., 2004).

Various studies have searched for the predictions of life satisfaction, and as a result they concluded that the good predictions of life satisfaction are hope (Bailey et al., 2007; Olson-Madden, 2008; Wong & Lim, 2009), self-respect (Campbell, 1981; Diener & Diener, 1995; Olson-Madden, 2008), positive attitude towards life (Penezić, Ivanov, 2000), but as well, a better material status (Martinis, 2005). The results of the study also show that self-respect is significantly connected with satisfaction with one's family (Diener & Diener, 1995).

When it comes to life satisfaction in regards to gender/sex, the results of some studies show that women are slightly more satisfied with their lives in comparison with men (Diener & Diener, 1995), and that satisfaction with one's life is a better predictor of life satisfaction when it comes to women (Diener & Diener, 1995).

There are contradictory results when it comes to the link between life satisfaction and age. And while Diener (Diener, 1984), and later on Penezić (1999) report that there is no significant correlation between life satisfaction and age, Wilson (Wilson, 1967, in: Horley & Lavery, 1995) claims that there is a negative correlation showing that older examinees are less happy than the younger ones. Horley and Lavery (Horley & Lavery, 1995) came up with the results which are showing that satisfaction with life raises with age, particularly with the examinees older than 40.

Although it is possible to reach a conclusion that this issue is being quite well and empirically researched, based on this review of relevant studies in the field of human well-being, the question of real correlation among the variables remains open, as well as the question of clear defining and proper terminology designation for numerous constructs in the area of salutogenic orientation and salutogenic approach to health.

Penezić (Penezić, 2006) emphasizes that the majority of current studies of life satisfaction were mostly of correlational type and the question of direction and depth of causality remains. This author suggests the future research in the area should be organized in the experimental form, quazi-experimental research, and lastly as a panel study (Penezić, 2006, s 649).

Research in our country have gained data speaking in favour of the existence of quite satisfactory values of life satisfaction as well as some other resources for stress overcoming among the youth (Randelović, Minić, 2012). Some studies in our country have mentioned the importance of correlation between life satisfaction and school success. (Božin, 2003; Randelović, Kostić, Minić, 2013).

As indicated by Božin (Božin, 2003) school performance is the outcome of prevalence, but it is also generalized resource of one's resistance, which facilitates overcoming of tensions connected to school and education. For Božin (Božin, 2003) school performance is a psychological question, and he searches for the answer in salutogenic model of Antonovsky (Aaron Antonovsky). Based on principles of salutogenic model and salutogenic orientation, Božin (Božin, 2003) emphasizes that school performance represents the place which one person occupies in imagined continuum; one end of this continuum stands for 'outstanding success', the other represents 'complete failure'. Cognitive abilities, prior knowledge, parents' aspirations connected to education of children, motivation, social support and so on, are representing important factors of school performance, which Božin (Božin, 2003) in line with salutogenic model, identifies as generalized resources of resistance, important for successful overcoming of the so called "school stressors".

Nevertheless, it is a fact that life satisfaction is *de facto* connected with the various aspects of mental health (Randelović i Minić, 2012), and there are empirical data proving that mental health among the young in Serbia is quite disturbed (Dimitrijević, Randelović, 2012; Randelović, 2011; Žikic et al, 2013). All this points to the need to empirically follow the data referring to this aspect of human's life.

Dimitrijević and Randelović (Dimitrijevic, Randjelovic, 2012) report about some aspects of mental health among the students of the University of Niš. The study primarily focused on the objective (primary aggression and stress) and subjective (the attitudes of students) indicators of the students' needs for using the services of the Psychological Counseling Center. A part of these results is presented by the authors Dimitrijević and Randelović (Dimitrijević and Randelović, 2012). The sample consisted of 988 students studying at the universities in the south of Serbia (Niš and Kosovska Mitrovica) The result indicates that the students have statistically significant higher level of the prominence of the primary aggression compared to average values. The majority of students (81.2%) think that the psychological counseling for students should exist, and that they would probably use (60.1% of the total sample size) the services provided by this free student's service. Despite the fact that 62.4% of students have at least once felt the need to talk about their problems to a psychologist, and that there is the willingness to use the services of the free psychological counseling center, so far, the insufficient number of students have actually asked for help. Those who said that they have never felt the need to talk about their problems to a psychologist have statistically significant higher level of primary aggressiveness and are more susceptible to stress than those who have felt the need, and who have indicated their willingness to use the services of the psychological counseling center. Dimitrijević and Randelović (2012)

emphasize that the experience of the Psychological Counseling Center in Niš shows an increase in the number of students who decide to report to a psychologist.

Another study from this region by the authors Žikic and others (Žikic et al, 2013) states the results of the study which dealt with anxiety and depressiveness among the students with “childhood War-related” experiences. The aim of the study was to determine the differences in intensity of anxiety and depressiveness, as well as frequency of clinically relevant form of this emotion, among those students who were exposed to warfare during childhood. The study included 324 students from Serbia and Kosovo, aged 18-25. At the time of the clashes (in 1999), their ages ranged from 6 to 13 years. The authors used the General questionnaire, the Beck Depression Inventory I (BDI-I), and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). Approximately 2/3 of all of the examinees had clinically significant anxiety, while 1/3 had clinically significant depressiveness. The females had higher intensity of anxiety (16.22 vs. 11.6; $p < 0.001$) and depressiveness (9.57 vs. 7.05; $p = 0.004$) than males. The examinees who reported war related experiences (WREs) from two or three types of events had more intense anxiety ($p = 0.013$) and depressiveness ($p = 0.013$) than a group with one or no WREs. There is an association between WREs during childhood and anxiety as well as depression in adolescence, more prominent in females. A significant number of foreign researchers have been studying the connection between life satisfaction and some aspects of mental health (Guney et al, 2010; Headey et al, 1993). Giney and his associates report about the results of interrelation between life satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and hopelessness among Ankara University students ($N = 364$). Life satisfaction was negatively and significantly correlated with the scores from depression, anxiety and hopelessness scales. The findings suggest that the relationship between developing a psychological problem is highly associated with the perceived levels of anxiety, depression and life satisfaction. In addition, life satisfaction can be taken into account as a moderator variable for mental health studies.

Some interesting findings stated by Headey and his associates (Headey et al, 1993). The results of their research study have shown that one of the well-being dimensions, life satisfaction, is quite strongly correlated with a distress dimension, depression. A person is unlikely to be both satisfied with life and depressed, but may be satisfied and anxious.

METHOD

The aim of this research was to determine some indicators of life satisfaction. The correlation between life satisfaction, states of anxiety, depressiveness and academic achievements, was examined amongst the students of the University of Priština with a temporary location in Kosovska Mitrovica. Also, the possibility to predict the life satisfaction was examined, based on the values of anxiety, depressiveness and academic achievements among the students. Possible amplitude of values ranges from 6,00 to 10,00.

The Sample

The research included 321 students from the University of Pristina with temporary location in Kosovska Mitrovica. The sample consisted of the second year students from all the faculties of the University of Pristina. The quotes were determined in regards to gender/sex, year of study, as well as based on the active participation in the faculty lectures. The sample gathered students of the second year from all the departments belonging to all the faculties of the University, and the criteria for choosing the sample was an active participation of the students in the lecturing process. (we received this information from the student's office of each of the faculties). After we received an approval from the faculty management, as well as the consent for the students' participating in the research, an examination was conducted during the regular classes (the assistants gave us their class lasting 45). The questionnaires were distributed to groups (groups of 25-30 students). A total of 164 male and 157 female examinees were questioned, while an average age of the sample was 21,99 years.

Measures

Academic success. In this research the academic success is operationally assessed through an average mark during the studies (taking in consideration all subject envisaged by a curriculum)

The state of anxiety is measured by Beck's Anxiety Inventory. Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck,

Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988; Lam, Michalk, & Swinson, 2005) – Beck’s anxiety scale is a multiple choice self-report inventory used for measuring the severity of an individual's anxiety. It contains 21 questions.

Depression was measured by means of Beck’s Depression Inventory I (BDI-I) (Beck, 1961; Richter, Werner, Heerlien, Kraus, & Sauer, 1998) - Beck’s depression scale is a self-report questionnaire used to assess the intensity of depression. It is composed of 21 items that are answered on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3 (with scores ranging 0 - 63); higher scores indicate greater severity of depression. A cut-off score for the presence of clinically significant form of depression is 10 points. Instrument reliability regarding this sample, based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient, was satisfactory and equaled 0.79. The scale is in Serbian.

Some authors have been explaining *life satisfaction* as a cognitive evaluation of life in general, through which each individual is able to assess his own life (Penezić, 1999). This variable is operationally defined by a score on the Scale of life satisfaction (Penezić, 1996). The scale of general life satisfaction consists of 20 items, where 17 of them refers to the evaluation of general satisfaction with one's life, whereas the remaining 3 refer to the assessment of situational satisfaction with life. This scale presents an integration of several scales: satisfaction with life scale (*Satisfaction With Life Scale*- SWLS; Larsen, et al., 1985) comprised of five items; Scale of general satisfaction (Bezinović, 1988) comprised of seven items; Scale of positive attitude towards life (*Positive Attitudes Toward Life* – PATL; Grob, 1995) from which five items were taken and three more from the Scale of enjoying life (*Joy in Life Scale* – JLS; Grob, 1995) which mainly serves for the assessment of situational content. The scale of general life satisfaction is used to measure the satisfaction with life as a cognitive assessment. The examinees are asked to assess on a five-grade scale of Likert’s type, to what extent each of the items refers to them. The total score is achieved by a linear combination of answers, and the results are ranging from 20 to 100, with the higher score marking the higher satisfaction with life. The reliability of an internal consistence of a scale in whole equals $\alpha = 0.90$ for this particular sample.

For the purpose of this research the questionnaire of sociodemographic characteristics has been used, which includes the control variables (sex, age, the faculty they are attending, place of residence etc.).

FINDINGS

The range of basic variables in the study

Chart no.1 offers the basic descriptive data for the basic variables in the research (state of anxiety, depression, life satisfaction, academic achievements).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the main variables in the research

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	321	0	63	13.47	11.82
Depressiveness	321	0	39	7.52	7.52
Life satisfaction	321	28	100	73.03	13.46
Academic achievement	321	6	9.90	7.67	.91

The results show that the examinees have a slightly expressed anxiety (considering the criteria given by Lam, 2005), low depressiveness, but at the same time above the average satisfaction with life (in regards to the possible theoretical range on the scale of life satisfaction).

Having considered that a significant number of researchers have been dealing with the issues of anxiety and depressiveness among the youth (Richter *et al.*, 1998; Lam, et all, 2005) this paper aims to show whether the values of individual examinees on the scales of anxiety and life satisfaction are clinically significant or not. In tables 2 and 3, the frequencies and percentages of some categories of expressed anxiety are shown (following the criteria given by Lam, 2005) and depressiveness (taking into consideration the categories suggested by Richter et all, 1998).

Table 2: The anxiety of students shown through different categories

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	none clinically significant	120	37.4	37.4
	mild	91	28.3	65.7
	moderate	63	19.6	85.4
	high	47	14.6	100.0
	Total	321	100.0	

Data from table no.2 are showing that only 37,4 % of examinees do not have a clinically significant levels of anxiety, even though the majority of the examinees (65,7%) do not have a higher level of anxiety which has been categorized by Lam into the mild anxiety category.

Table 3: Depressiveness among the students shown in categories

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None clinically significant	228	71.0	71.0
	mild	65	20.2	91.3
	moderate	20	6.2	97.5
	high	8	2.5	100.0
	Total	321	100.0	

Table no. 3 clearly show that 71 % of examinees do not have a clinically significant levels of expressed anxiety.

The inter-connection of basic variables in the study

According to the aims of this research, the connection between life satisfaction, anxiety, depressiveness and academic achievements among the students was examined. Person's correlation coefficient was used for that purpose, as shown in the table no.4.

Table 4: correlation between anxiety, depressiveness, academic achievement and life satisfaction (Pearson's coefficient of correlation)

	Anxiety	Depressiveness	Academic achievement	Life satisfaction
Anxiety	1	.492(**)	.017	-.342(**)
Depressiveness	.492(**)	1	-.047	-.492(**)
Academic achievement	.017	-.047	1	.140(*)
Life satisfaction	-.342(**)	-.492(**)	.140(*)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Based on the data from the table no.4 it is clear that anxiety is statistically, significantly and positively correlated with depressiveness ($r=0.492$, $p<0.01$), while at the same time it is negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r= -0.342$, $p<0.01$). Depressiveness is in a negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r=-0.492$, $p<0.01$). Academic achievements is in a statistically significant and positive correlation with life satisfaction ($r=0.140$, $p<0.05$).

Possibility of predicting life satisfaction

One of questions in this study was whether there is a possibility to predict the value of life satisfaction, based on the predicting variables: anxiety, depressiveness and academic achievement. This particular issue was investigated by means of a multiple regression analysis, by the so called *enter procedure*. The results are shown in the table no.5.

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis : anxiety, depressiveness and academic success as a prediction of life satisfaction among the students (enter procedure)

Predictors	Criteria: Life satisfaction		Model summary
	Beta (β)	Significance	
anxiety	-.138	.013	R= 0.270**
depressiveness	-.418	.000	R ² = 0.268**
Academic achievements	.123	.011	F(3,317)= 39.104 Significance = 0.000

Note: Beta (β) – concise regression coefficient; R – coefficient of multiple correlation; R² – coefficient of multiple determination; ** p< 0.01; *p<0.05.

The coefficient of a multiple correlation equals R= 0.754 and explains the linear correlation between the criterion variable (life satisfaction) and predictors (anxiety, depressiveness, academic success). The coefficient of a multiple determination equals R² = 0.268, which means that the variance percent is common for the criterium and the congregation of predicting variables involved in the procedure 27%.

As shown from the results in table no.5 it is possible to conclude that life satisfaction is possible to be foreseen based on the composition of examined predictors (anxiety, depressiveness, academic success). Based on the values of standardized regression coefficients, we can see that the predictors are in a significant amount included in the process of explaining variances. Depressiveness turned out as the best predictor (β = -0.418), while anxiety and academic achievement came out as significant predictors.

DISCUSSION

The results relating to some of the aspects of mental health among the examined students (anxiety and depressiveness) seem disturbing, especially if tables 2 and 3 are taken into consideration. Majority of examinees (62,6%) are placed in the category " has a mild anxiety", but at the same time they are clinically significant (according to Lam, 2005). Meanwhile, 29% of the examinees (table 3) have some of the categories of clinically significant depressiveness (according to the criteria offered by Richter et all, 1998). These results correspond with some of the former studies in our country (Žikić et all, 2013; Randelović et all, 2013). Surely, one should have in mind that during their studies the students reside on the territory of Kosovo and Metohia, with abundance of stressful and often life-threatening conditions (Dimitrijević i Randelović, 2012; Randelović i Minić, 2012; Randelović et all, 2013). All that implies to the need for preventive activities in order to protect and preserve mental health among the students.

Even though, the data showing that students have a rather high values of life satisfaction sounds rather encouraging (table 1), which speaks in favor of existence of valuable resources used by these young people when facing the daily stressful life conditions (which has been confirmed by some formes studies : Randelović & Minić, 2012).

The positive statistically significant correlation between anxiety and depressiveness is a due result, which has been confirmed in various former research studies (Guney et all, 2010, Zikić et all, 2013), so we can understand that the more depressive persons are usually more anxious. At the same time, both of these variables are significantly and negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Hence, persons which are more depressive and anxious, are less satisfied with their life. These findings are in a direct compliance with Guney's (Guney et all,



2010) research, while not being in full compliance with the research of Headey and associates (Headey et al,1993), which offered a data that more anxious persons are not less satisfied with their life in comparison with those less anxious people.

A statistically significant and positive correlation between academic success and life satisfaction has been confirmed, although it is rather low. This directly supports the findings of Bean and Bradley (Bean& Bradley, 1986). One of the possible explanations for the observed positive correlation, is that high life satisfaction levels may boost an individual's confidence in their ability to achieve high grades. So, individuals may become more actively engaged in study and as a result, their academic performance increases. The nature of the relationship between academic performance and life satisfaction suggests that when academic performance increases so does life satisfaction.

We find the result related to the possibility to predict life satisfaction based on the composition of predicting variables (anxiety, depressiveness and academic achievements) particularly important. The percent of the variance of life satisfaction (27%) based on the mentioned variables is not negligible, and offers the basis for design of appropriate preventive activities, aiming to improve various aspects contributing the satisfaction with life among the students. Considering the fact that depressiveness has turned out as the best predictor with the negative sign of beta coefficient (which means that the lower the depressiveness, the higher the satisfaction with life). It is possible to assume that the psychological work of appropriate services (included in educational and health institutions) aiming to diminish the risky factors which are advantageous for raising depressiveness, and which could have some positive effects on life satisfaction among the students' population by organizing preventive and educational activities.

CONCLUSION

This paper gives a humble contribution to the continuous monitoring of mental health among the youth in Serbia and the search for various health factors which were theoretically explained in a salutogenic approach, founded on the basis of positive psychology. The correlation between certain aspects of life satisfaction points to the need of an interdisciplinary approach in this matter (clinical psychology, positive psychology, psychology of education). Although the academic achievement in this particular research is in a rather mild connection with life satisfaction, the fact remains that correlation is statistically significant. At the same time, the results of some former studies speak about the importance of studying the student's success and currently empirically confirmed correlations between the academic success and various aspects of human well-being (happiness, optimism, etc.). Hence, maybe some of the future studies should include a higher number of variables relating to different aspects of academic success, as well as a higher number of variables from the domain of a biased well-being.

The data gathered about the life satisfaction predictors among the students, and the percentage of the explained variance offer a possibility to take various measures of prevention, which would be targeted towards promotion, preservation and improvement of the student's mental health, pointing to the importance of the positive factors.

All the results imply to the need for continuous monitoring of mental health among the young people (not just students), both through these research studies and perhaps by organizing various forms of psychological counseling for youth as a form of primary prevention. Involvement and support of state institutions, local governments and other organizations interested in the mental health of young people would be of great importance.

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