

# Comparison of Subjective Wellbeing and Positive Future Expectations in Between Working and Nonworking Adolescents in Turkey

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## Abstract

**Background:** Wellbeing is one's evaluation and judgment of one's life. It consists of 3 dimensions: positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to compare the subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations between working and nonworking adolescents.

**Patients and Methods:** The study was designed as descriptive and comparative. The study sample consisted of 420 working and 482 nonworking adolescents (n = 902) aged 15 - 20 years, who were randomly recruited from two occupational education centers in Istanbul, Turkey and two high schools (formal educations) in the same district.

**Results:** Adolescent subjective wellbeing scale (ASWS) total mean (SD) scores for working adolescents and nonworking adolescents were 48.76 (9.50) and 49.72 (8.01), respectively. In addition, positive future expectations scale (PFES) total mean (SD) scores for working adolescents and nonworking adolescents were 18.71 (4.50) and 19.06 (3.49), respectively. In this study, no significant difference was found between the general wellbeing (scale total median score) scores of the working and nonworking adolescent groups ( $Z = 1.01, P = 0.315$ ). However, significant differences were found in the family relations satisfaction ( $Z = 3.23, P = 0.002$ ) and relations with significant others ( $Z = 2.85, P = 0.004$ ) subscales of the ASWS.

**Conclusions:** A positive relationship was found between adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations. It was found that nonworking adolescents scored higher on the dimensions of "family relations" and "relations with significant others" of subjective wellbeing compared to those dimensions in working adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Wellbeing, Future Expectation, Occupational Education, Formal Education

## 1. Background

Wellbeing is defined as one's evaluation and judgment of one's life. It consists of 3 dimensions: positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and life satisfaction. A person possesses high subjective wellbeing when she or he experiences positive affects more frequently, negative affects less frequently, and high life satisfaction. Wellbeing is considered as a significant indicator of life satisfaction and happiness (1, 2). Diener (1) defined wellbeing as "the cognitive and affective evaluation of one's own life" and emphasizes the cognitive and affective aspects of wellbeing. The affective dimension of wellbeing includes the person's happiness and emotional wellbeing. It consists of negative and positive affects while the cognitive dimension is based on the person's thoughts regarding his or her life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is based on a cognitive evaluation of one's leading a good life (1, 3). The literature suggests that subjective wellbeing can protect mental health; for example, those with higher subjective

wellbeing tend to be more social and creative, more productive, and better at coping with stress (4-8).

Adolescence is defined as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood in which a multitude of biological, physical, social, and psychological changes and developments take place (9, 10). Unlike adults, adolescents question more frequently their opinions regarding the future of themselves and society. Constructing positive expectations for the future is closely associated with high self-esteem and using effective coping mechanisms. In addition, negative expectations for the future and ambivalent expectations can be associated with low wellbeing and hopelessness (11).

According to 2009-2010 database of the Institution for statistics of Turkey (TUIK), Turkey has 113646 adolescents in the age range of 15 - 22 years who continue their apprenticeship education. Vocational education covers a range of 168 programs consisting of a multitude of occupational areas, from carving wood to leather manufacturing, hair-

dressings, and carpentry. In Turkey, vocational education is managed by code 3308 and includes candidates for the positions of apprenticeship, apprentice, foreman, and master (12). Those adolescents continuing their vocational education attend 6 - 8 hours of formal education in education centers and continue their practical education (for 32 - 40 hours per week) by working at those workplaces. Work life can lead to the interruption of the adaptational resources of the adolescents expected to be invested in terms of time and energy to school, to family, and to friends. Such adolescents can have psychosocial difficulties when working in jobs that conflict with autonomy, self-esteem, and goal-directedness. Specifically, those adolescents recruited for stressful jobs may be more vulnerable to general health problems and mental disorders (13).

Studies on adolescent subjective wellbeing have become more prevalent in Turkey and other countries (14, 15). While adolescent subjective wellbeing has been investigated in terms of its relation to various variables such as age, gender, culture, and identity status (3, 6, 8, 9, 14-17), research regarding the relationship between adolescent wellbeing and positive future expectations is scarce (18). Especially, there has been little scientific effort to compare working adolescents and adolescents continuing their high school formal education in terms of subjective wellbeing and future expectations.

In Turkey, which has a significantly large young population, it is generally expected that adolescents should have a university degree. Families invest both financially and emotionally in university education for their children (such as having their children take private lessons or sending them to private institutions that prepare them for college examinations). Although those adolescents who continue their vocational education gain extra points in the college examination in applying the fields related to the occupation they were trained, they are still negatively affected since they have studied subjects different from what other adolescents who have received formal education had been studying. Therefore, it can be expected that the future expectancies of adolescents will be affected by their work life both in terms of job preference and conditions of life. In developed countries, adolescents usually work part-time and spend their money on their private expenses. However in Turkey, adolescents are usually obliged to work full-time due to the financial problems of their families or their own shortcomings in academic life. Besides, in Turkish families, which carry collectivistic characteristics, the father is expected to be the breadwinner of the family. The financial contribution of an adolescent may affect his or her position in the family, the roles carried out by the family members, and conflicts between parents and adolescent.

## 2. Objectives

This study aimed to compare the adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations of working and non-working adolescents in Turkey.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Participants

In Turkey, working adolescents attend vocational education centers 1 day per week (8 hours) and work full-day at various enterprises 4 or 5 times a week (32 or 40 hours). They earn between TL 300 and TL 1500 (102.90 and 514.51 Dollar) depending on the job and have insurance only for work accidents. Data for this study were collected in Istanbul over the period February - June 2013. Adolescents that were between 15 and 20 years old were included in the study. The exclusion criteria were the presence of a self-reported physical illness, mental disorder or disability in the adolescent or in the parents, and death of a parent (considering it might affect the positive future expectation and subjective wellbeing of the adolescent). While 902 adolescents meeting the criteria were included in the study, 87 adolescents were excluded, either because they did not meet the criteria or due to their incompletely filled out questionnaires.

The study was conducted in two centers which randomly selected from vocational education centers in Istanbul with similar characteristics (16 centers). According to Kilic (19), one of the methods that can be used to calculate sample size is power analysis. With a margin of error ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 for this study, an expected power of 0.80 and a Z value of 1.96, the sample size was calculated as 897. Participants were selected from the centers via the systematic sampling method (selecting every  $n^{\text{th}}$  student from the list). The study was conducted with 420 of the 909 adolescents working and continuing their education in two vocational education centers and 482 of the 1027 adolescents continuing their formal education in the same district ( $n = 902$ ). Besides the main purpose of the study, it was designed to compare subjective wellbeing and positive future expectancies, between two groups of adolescents with similar sociodemographic characteristics but different education and work experience. However, a significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of gender (no significant relationship was found between gender and subjective wellbeing and positive future expectancy). Such a difference is likely to be the result of the limited opportunities of vocational education for female adolescents in Turkey. Female adolescents may be forced not to continue their education even when they succeed in academic life, and those who do not continue education usually work at home. Therefore, it was not possible to control the effect of gender by maintaining similar rates.

### 3.2. Questionnaire

In this study, a demographic questionnaire, adolescent subjective wellbeing scale (ASWS), and positive future expectations scale (PFES) were used to assess sociodemographic information, subjective wellbeing, and future expectations, respectively.

Demographic questionnaire: this form was designed by the researchers to include the independent variables of the study and contains multiple-choice questions about age, gender, family type, parent occupational status, and family income.

Adolescent Subjective Wellbeing Scale: ASWS is a self-report scale designed in Turkey by Eryilmaz (20). He stated that this scale has been prepared based on the literature, and a structure based on 4 factors was achieved after item and factor analyses. As a result, the scale includes 4 subscales: family relations satisfaction (FRS), life satisfaction (LS), positive affects (PA), and satisfaction in relations with significant others (SRSO). Items number 1, 2, 3, and 4 (e.g. my family supports me) constitute the FRS; items number 5, 6, 7, and 8 (e.g. I have a good time with my friends) constitute the SRSO; items number 9, 10, and 11 (e.g. I live as I wish) constitute the LS; and items number 12, 13, 14, and 15 (e.g. I am generally joyful) constitute the PA subscale. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale; each item is rated as 1 = definitely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = definitely agree. The highest possible score is 60. Higher total scores indicate better adolescent wellbeing, while higher scores in the subscales indicate positive self-report on the relevant subscale (20).

In the study by Eryilmaz (20), the internal consistency for FRS was  $\alpha = 0.83$ , for SRSO  $\alpha = 0.73$ , for LS  $\alpha = 0.81$ , and for PA  $\alpha = 0.66$ . The internal consistency for the total score was  $\alpha = 0.83$ . In the present study, the internal consistency for FRS was  $\alpha = 0.81$ , for SRSO  $\alpha = 0.75$ , for LS  $\alpha = 0.83$ , and for PA  $\alpha = 0.72$ . The internal consistency for the total score in the present study was found to be  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

Positive future expectations scale: PFES is a self-report scale constructed in Turkey Imamoglu and Edwards (21), and consists of 5 items measuring the degree of positive expectations one holds towards one's personal future. The items of the scale are as follows: "I am optimistic about my personal future," "I believe that sooner or later, I will attain my goals," "I am optimistic about succeeding in what I want to do in the future," "I am a little pessimistic about my personal future," and "Despite various difficulties, I hold an optimistic view of the future." Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale as 1 = definitely disagree, 2 = partly disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = mostly agree, and 5 = definitely agree. Item number 4 is reverse-coded and the highest possible score is 20. Higher scores indicate more positive future expectations. In the original study, the internal consistency was found to be  $\alpha = 0.93$  (21). In the present study, Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this measure was 0.82.

### 3.3. Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 17.00. A histogram was used to determine the normality of distribution and it was found that the data outside of age were nonparametric. Data regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the adolescents in the sample were analyzed using de-

scriptive statistical analyses. The relationship between adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations was analyzed using Spearman correlational analysis. The adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectation scores of working and nonworking samples were compared using the Mann-Whitney U test. Another Mann-Whitney U test was run to analyze the relationship between gender and adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations.

### 3.4. Ethical Issues

The Istanbul provincial directorate for national education committee approved the study (approval dated May 11, 2012, "B.08.4.MEM.0.34.14.00-020"). Before starting the study, the school administrator was informed about the research. Also, all of the participants were informed that their personal data would be kept confidential. All participants gave their informed consent after receiving both written and oral information about the study. All data collection instruments were administered to the adolescents in the classroom setting.

## 4. Results

The mean (SD) age of working adolescents was 17.24 (1.22) years while the mean (SD) age of non-working adolescents was 16.69 (1.23) years; there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of age ( $t = 1.41$ ,  $P = 0.16$ ). Of the adolescents, 46.6% constituted the working adolescent group who were continuing their vocational education, whereas the remaining 53.4% constituted the nonworking group continuing their high school education (Table 1). Although no significant difference was found between the working and nonworking adolescent groups in terms of parental occupational status, family type, and perceived income ( $P > .05$ ), a significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of gender ( $\chi^2 = 15.50$ ;  $P = 0.001$ ). The number of females was lower in the working adolescents group. In the whole sample, no significant difference in terms of ASWS and PFES total mean scores were found between females ( $n = 295$ ) and males ( $n = 607$ ) ( $Z = 1.09$ ,  $P = 0.289$ ). In the sample as a whole, ASWS total mean (SD) score was 49.28 (8.74). Furthermore, the mean (SD) scores for the ASWS subscales of FRS, LS, PA, and SRSO were 13.70 (3.03), 9.09 (2.37), 13.10 (2.55), and 13.37 (2.71), respectively.

The ASWS total mean (SD) score for working adolescents was 48.76 (9.50), and mean (SD) scores for ASWS subscales of FRS, LS, PA, and SRSO were 13.46 (2.90), 9.14 (2.48), 13.10 (2.70), and 13.04 (3.02), respectively.

In nonworking adolescents, ASWS total mean (SD) score was 49.72 (8.01); and mean (SD) scores for ASWS subscales of FRS, LS, PA, and SRSO were 13.91 (3.12), 9.04 (2.28), 13.11 (2.41), and 13.65 (2.38), respectively. No significant difference was found between the general wellbeing (total score) scores of the working and nonworking adolescent groups ( $Z = 1.01$ ,  $P = 0.315$ ). However, significant differ-

ences were found in the FRS ( $Z = 3.23, P = 0.002$ ) and SRSO ( $Z = 2.85, P = 0.004$ ) subscales of ASWS. It was found that nonworking adolescents experienced higher satisfaction than working adolescents in their FRS and SRSO in terms of subjective wellbeing. In addition, PFES total mean (SD) score was 18.71 (4.50) for working adolescents, and 19.06 (3.49) for nonworking adolescents. Though nonworking

adolescents scored higher on future expectations, the difference was not significant ( $Z = 1.08, P = 0.276$ ) (Table 2).

In both samples, there was a positive relationship between PFES total mean score and the ASWS total mean score ( $r = 0.57, P < 0.01$ ), FRS ( $r = 0.60, P < 0.01$ ), LS ( $r = 0.36, P < 0.01$ ), SRSO ( $r = 0.49, P < 0.01$ ), and PA ( $r = 0.50, P < 0.01$ ) subscales (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic Characteristics of Adolescents<sup>a,b</sup>

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Working Adolescent	Nonworking Adolescents	Total
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	50 (11.9)	245 (50.8)	295 (32.7)
Male	370 (88.1)	237 (49.2)	607 (67.3)
<b>Family type</b>			
Nuclear family	369 (87.9)	445 (92.3)	814 (90.2)
Extended family	45 (10.7)	21 (4.4)	66 (7.3)
Fragmented family	6 (1.4)	16 (3.3)	22 (2.4)
<b>Mother's work status</b>			
Housewife	358 (85.2)	387 (80.3)	745 (82.6)
Working	62 (14.8)	95 (19.7)	157 (17.4)
<b>Father's work status</b>			
Working	383 (91.2)	423 (82.8)	806 (89.4)
Unemployed	37 (8.8)	59 (17.2)	96 (10.6)
<b>Definitions of family income</b>			
Very good	22 (5.2)	17 (3.5)	39 (4.3)
Good	143 (34.0)	196 (40.7)	339 (37.6)
Moderate	225 (53.6)	247 (51.2)	472 (52.3)
Poor	25 (6.0)	19 (3.9)	44 (4.9)
Very poor	5 (1.2)	3 (0.6)	8 (0.9)

<sup>a</sup>N = 902.

<sup>b</sup>Values are presented as No. (%).

**Table 2.** Comparison of Subjective Wellbeing and Positive Future Expectations in Working and Nonworking Adolescents

Variables	Working Adolescents		Nonworking Adolescents		Z	P Value
	Mean (SD)	Median	Mean (SD)	Median		
PFES	18.71 (4.50)	17.15	19.06 (3.49)	17.00	0.30	.750
ASWS	48.76 (9.50)	48.88	49.72 (8.01)	49.39	1.01	.315
FRS	13.46 (2.90)	14.00	13.91 (3.12)	15.13	3.23	.002
PA	13.10 (2.70)	13.14	13.11 (2.41)	13.00	0.16	.685
LS	9.14 (2.48)	9.42	9.04 (2.28)	9.00	1.79	.093
SPSO	13.04 (3.02)	13.01	13.65 (2.18)	14.00	2.85	.004

Abbreviations: ASWS, adolescent subjective wellbeing scale; FRS, family relations satisfaction; LS, life satisfaction; PA, positive affects; PFES, positive future expectations scale; SPSO, satisfaction in relations with significant others; Z, Mann-Whitney U.

**Table 3.** Relationship Between Adolescents' Subjective Wellbeing and Positive Future Expectations<sup>a,b</sup>

Variables	PFES	ASWS	FRS	PA	LS	SPSO
<b>PFES</b>						
<b>ASWS</b>	.57					
<b>FRS</b>	.60	.88				
<b>PA</b>	.50	.83	.66			
<b>LS</b>	.36	.80	.80	.54		
<b>SPSO</b>	.49	.91	.92	.65	.69	

Abbreviations: ASWS, adolescent subjective wellbeing scale; FRS, family relations satisfaction; PA, positive affects; LS, life satisfaction; SPSO, satisfaction in relations with significant others.

<sup>a</sup>Coefficients of relationship (r) are calculated by Spearman correlation.

<sup>b</sup> $p < 0.01$ .

## 5. Discussion

The present study aimed to compare adolescent subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations of working and nonworking adolescents. Subjective wellbeing has been considered in the literature as an important indicator of life satisfaction and happiness (2, 4, 6, 7, 17). This study aimed to contribute to the literature by comparing the subjective wellbeing and positive future expectations of a group under risk of mental illness, working adolescents, with their peers. It was found that the adolescent subjective wellbeing total scores of the two groups were close and above an intermediate level. These results are in accordance with other subjective wellbeing studies conducted on adolescents in Turkey (18, 22).

While no significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of general adolescent subjective wellbeing scores, nonworking adolescents were found to experience significantly higher satisfaction on family relations than working adolescents. Even though the literature indicates that work life can affect family relations of adolescents, it is a highly controversial issue. Evidently, work life may affect family relations in various ways depending on the age, gender, and working conditions of the adolescents. In addition, work life can decrease the time an adolescent spends with the family and the likelihood of the adolescent's submitting to rules at home. Also it may lead to more independence on the part of the adolescence than was expected by the parents. Besides, a heavy workload (working full-time) may result in difficulties in communicating with the parents (23, 24). Difficulties in communication and conflicts in the family may, in turn, result in an decreased level of relationship satisfaction (25). Considering the presence of sociocultural, economical, and family variables affecting the family relations satisfaction of the adolescent, the work life of the adolescent may be one of the factors negatively affecting family relations satisfaction.

In terms of another subdimension of subjective wellbeing, "satisfaction in relations with significant others," nonworking adolescents were found to experience significantly higher satisfaction than working adolescents. For adolescents, peers and authority figures are significant others throughout their development. While peer relations play an important role for adolescents in meeting the needs for intimate relationships (26), authority figures

such as teachers and parents are important for role modeling and identification (27). Work life results in the restriction of time an adolescent can spend with peers, and the inclusion of other authority figures to the adolescent's life such as superiors, line managers, and bosses (28). In this regard, it was hypothesized that relations with such distinctive persons who are specific to the group of working adolescents may lead to relationship difficulties and thus negatively affect satisfaction in this area.

Positive future expectations scores for working and nonworking adolescents indicated that adolescents from both groups held positive expectations towards the future. These results are in accordance with the results of the Eryilmaz study conducted on adolescents (18). Raffaelli and Koller (29) found in their study on adolescents aged 10 - 18 years that adolescents in general hold positive expectations towards the future (2). According to the literature, holding positive expectations towards the future makes it easier for adolescents to strive to achieve their goals, relates to healthy behavioral development (18, 23, 30) and prevents mental disorders, especially depression (21). The results are meaningful as adolescents in both groups hold positive expectations towards the future.

While positive future expectations were found to be higher in nonworking adolescents compared to working adolescents, the difference was not significant. This shows that the future expectations of working adolescents do not differ from those of their nonworking peers. Nurmi found that the future expectations of adolescents tend to be general, not specific, consistent with social norms, and becoming more specific with increasing age (11). Considering the literature and the fact that the adolescents in the study held positive expectations towards the future, such results are not unexpected.

Significant positive relationships were found in the adolescent's positive future expectations, adolescent's subjective wellbeing, FRS, LS, SRSO, and PA subscales. It was found that as positive future expectations increased, subjective wellbeing also tended to increase. This finding is in line with the findings of Eryilmaz, suggesting that positive future expectations of adolescents lead to an increase in the level of adolescent subjective wellbeing (18). It also suggests that supporting positive future expectations in adolescence can

also lead to a rise in the subjective wellbeing of adolescents.

The results of the study are limited to the sample group and cannot be generalized to all groups of working and nonworking adolescents. To generalize more, studies must be conducted on broader samples, including participants from different socioeconomic statuses. Family relations were not assessed in detail in this study and therefore we cannot be sure that findings regarding the subjective wellbeing subdimensions like "satisfaction in family relations," are associated with work life, and this constitutes another limitation of the study.

The strength of the study comprises comparison of adolescent groups continuing their studies in formal education with those studying in the vocational education system and such studies in the literature are scarce.

## Footnote

**Author's Contribution:** Study concept and design: Semra Karaca, Ayse Karakoc, Fadime Bingol, and Nurhan Eren; analysis and interpretation of data: Semra Karaca, Ayse Karakoc, Fadime Bingol and Nurhan Eren; drafting of the manuscript: Semra Karaca, Ayse Karakoc, Fadime Bingol, Nurhan Eren, and Isil Isik Andsoy; critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Semra Karaca, Karakoc, Fadime Bingol, Nurhan Eren, and Isil Isik Andsoy; statistical analysis: Semra Karaca, Ayse Karakoc, Fadime Bingol, and Nurhan Eren.

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