Research

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Mediating Role of Hope in the Relationship between Happiness and Positive Childhood Experiences among University Students

Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Mutluluk ve Olumlu Çocukluk Yaşantıları Arasındaki İlişkide Umudun Aracı Rolü

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to analyse the mediating role of hope in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness.

Method: The study was conducted with 367 volunteer participants. Participants completed the Demographic Information Form, the Positive Childhood Experiences Scale, the State Hope Scale and the Oxford Happiness Scale Short Form. Structural Equation Modelling was performed using the data obtained.

Results: A moderate and positive relationship (r = .43) between positive childhood experiences and the sub-dimension of hope known as 'agentive thinking', and a weak but positive relationship (r = .24) between positive childhood experiences and the sub-dimension of hope known as 'alternative pathways' among university students. A positive and moderate correlation (r = .52) was observed between positive childhood experiences and happiness. According to the results of the mediation analysis, the direct effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness was found to be significant (β = .619, 95% CI [.399, .961]. Indirect effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness via hope was significant (β = .254, 95% Bootstrap CI [.091, .375]). These findings indicate that hope plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness.

Conclusion: Positive childhood experiences are a predictor of happiness and that hope mediates the relationship between these two variables

Keywords: Life attachment, psychometric properties, scale adaptation, network analysis, entrapment,

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma, olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının mutluluk ile arasındaki ilişkide umudun aracı rolünü analiz etmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Yöntem: Çalışma 367 gönüllü katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılara Demografik Bilgi Formu, Olumlu Çocukluk Yaşantıları Ölçeği, Sürekli Umut Ölçeği ve Oxford Mutluluk Ölçeği Kısa Formu uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler ile Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular: Üniversite öğrencilerinde olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının umudun alt boyutları olan eyleyici düşünce ile arasında orta düzeyde ve pozitif yönde (r=.43); alternatif yollar düşüncesi ile zayıf düzeyde ve pozitif yönde (r=.24) anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Olumlu çocukluk yaşantıları ve mutluluk arasında ise pozitif yönde ve orta düzeyde anlamlı bir ilişki (r=.52) olduğu görülmüştür. Aracılık analizi sonuçlarına göre olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının mutluluk üzerindeki doğrudan etkisi anlamlı bulunmuştur (β = .619, %95 GA [.399, .961], p < .001). Olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının umut aracılığıyla mutluluk üzerindeki dolaylı etkisinin de anlamlı olduğu belirlenmiştir (β = .254, %95 Bootstrap GA [.091, .375]). Bu bulgular, umudun olumlu çocukluk yaşantıları ile mutluluk arasındaki ilişkide kısmi aracı rol oynadığını göstermektedir.

Sonuç: Olumlu çocukluk yaşantılarının mutluluğun bir yordayıcısı olduğu ve bu iki değişken arasındaki ilişkiye umudun aracılık ettiği görülmüştür.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çocukluk çağı, olumlu çocukluk deneyimleri, umut, mutluluk, öznel iyi oluş

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Introduction

University years are a period during which individuals experience significant changes in their lives. During this time, whilst students strive to adapt to a new environment, they also undergo a critical emotional process due to heavy academic responsibilities. For this reason, the factors determining students' levels of happiness are a key focus for researchers. Happiness is associated with an individual feeling good about themselves and being satisfied with their life. Although there is no single definition of happiness, it is regarded as an emotion that all people aspire to achieve—and not merely aspire to, but also expect to experience continuously throughout their lives (Türkdoğan 2010). According to the Turkish Language Institution (TDK 2025), happiness is defined as "the state of being happy; joy, contentment, bliss, prosperity, happiness, and the joy or pleasure felt in connection with a momentary state", and in psychological literature, happiness is examined in relation to the concept of subjective well-being (Eryılmaz and Ercan 2011). According to Diener et al. (1984), it is defined not only as the experience of more positive emotions but also as possessing a high level of life satisfaction. Individuals who frequently experience positive emotions such as courage, determination, joy, trust and cheerfulness throughout their lives; who experience negative emotions such as anxiety, hatred, fear, unease and anger less frequently; and who have high levels of satisfaction with various aspects of life—such as marriage, work, health and sexuality—are characterised as happy individuals (Doğan and Sapmaz 2012).

When studies on happiness are examined, it becomes apparent that one of the concepts believed to predict happiness is positive childhood experiences (Doğan and Aydın 2021). Positive childhood experiences refer to a state arising from the sufficient experience of feelings such as happiness, care, trust and appreciation, which contribute positively to an individual's areas of development. An individual receiving sufficient love, having their psychological and general needs met, and growing up in a safe environment during childhood is an indication that they have had positive childhood experiences. However, an important point to note here is that the absence of negative childhood experiences does not necessarily imply that a positive childhood has been experienced. In this context, the necessity of experiencing sufficient positive experiences comes to the fore for a healthy childhood to have been experienced (Doğan and Yavuz 2020). In the literature, studies have been found examining the relationship between positive childhood experiences and cognitive emotion regulation skills, subjective well-being (Yaray 2023), self-awareness (Toraman 2022) and psychological resilience (Havan 2022). It is evident that positive childhood experiences act as a protective factor in an individual's life.

Recent international literature emphasizes that positive childhood experiences signify more than merely the absence of negative ones; they are regarded as independent, protective experiences that foster an individual's psychological development (Bethell et al. 2019). Specifically, it is reported that positive childhood experiences—such as emotional support from the family, secure attachment relationships, a sense of self-worth, social acceptance, and a sense of belonging—enhance psychological well-being and resilience to stress, while also yielding long-term positive effects on mental health in adulthood (Crandall et al. 2019). Consequently, positive childhood experiences are recognized as a crucial component of the psychological processes shaping an individual's later life.

Positive childhood experiences for individuals encompass dynamics such as growing up in a safe environment, emotional support, feeling valued by those around them, secure attachment, and being valued and appreciated (Doğan and Aydin 2020). Such experiences shape the individual's cognitive schemas and self-perceptions (Doğan and Yavuz 2020; Taş 2022; Alan 2025). On the other hand, positive cognitive schemas and positive self-beliefs support the individual's source of hope (Akuysal, Aydoğan and Deniz 2012; Taytaş and Kardaş 2022). In the study by Cihangir, Çankaya and Meydan (2018), it was also observed that hope predicts happiness.

Snyder's Hope Theory defines hope not merely as a trait consisting of positive expectations regarding the future, but as a cognitive and motivational construct that guides the individual's process of achieving goals (Snyder 2002). According to the theory, hope comprises "agency thinking"—which reflects the individual's determination and motivation to achieve set goals—and "pathways thinking"—which reflects the capacity to devise alternative routes to attain those goals (Snyder et al. 1991). The interplay of these two components

supports the individual in maintaining goal-oriented behavior despite obstacles and in developing adaptive coping strategies (Lopez et al. 2004). It is noted that individuals who experience positive events during childhood—such as secure attachment, emotional support, acceptance, and a sense of belonging—are better equipped to develop stronger beliefs in their own competence and to generate alternative solutions when facing challenges later in life (Marques et al. 2011). Accordingly, hope can be considered a significant psychological mechanism in explaining the relationship between positive childhood experiences and adult happiness (Snyder 2002;Gallagher and Lopez 2009).

Previous studies have demonstrated positive associations between positive childhood experiences and hope (Polat and Aliyev 2024; Ünal and Traş 2025), as well as between hope and happiness (Cihangir Çankaya and Meydan 2018; Murphy 2023). Nevertheless, empirical evidence examining whether hope explains the association between positive childhood experiences and happiness remains limited. Therefore, examining the mediating role of hope may contribute to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms linking early positive experiences with adult well-being.

Snyder's Hope Theory posits that hope is advanced through an individual's goal-oriented cognitive processes (Snyder 2002). According to the theory, hope consists of "agency thinking"—representing the motivation to pursue goals—and "pathway thinking"—representing the ability to generate alternative routes to achieve those goals (Snyder et al. 1991). It has been observed that individuals who experience a secure and accepting environment during childhood develop greater proficiency in these two cognitive components. Through this process, individuals not only demonstrate superior performance in goal setting but also become more capable of devising alternative solutions when faced with challenges (Lopez et al. 2004). Thus, positive childhood experiences foster hope, creating a psychological mechanism that enables individuals to evaluate their lives more positively and achieve higher levels of happiness (Gallagher and Lopez 2009). Within this theoretical framework, it is hypothesized that hope may play a mediating role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness.

This study was designed to examine the relationships between positive childhood experiences, hope and happiness among university students within the framework of the positive psychology approach. In particular, the aim is to determine whether hope functions as a mediating psychological mechanism in the effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness. University life is a significant developmental period during which individuals undergo intense changes academically, socially and emotionally. Identifying protective factors that influence individuals' levels of subjective well-being during this process is of great importance. Whilst the literature contains studies indicating positive relationships between positive childhood experiences and happiness, as well as between hope and happiness, it is evident that research examining the mediating role of hope in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness is limited. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature.

Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1. Positive childhood experiences are positively associated with happiness.

H2. Positive childhood experiences are positively associated with hope.

H3. Hope is positively associated with happiness.

H4. Hope mediates the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness.

Method

This study examined the mediating role of hope in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness. The study was conducted using a relational survey design (Karasar 2012). The relationships between the variables were assessed using Pearson correlation analysis and structural equation modeling. Approval for the conduct of the research was obtained from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Necmettin Erbakan University (Decision No: 2025/498, Approval Date: 30/05/2025). Following ethics

committee approval, participants were informed about the study, and their informed consent was obtained based on voluntary participation. T

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for parents in the study group

Variables		n	%
Gender	Female	305	83
	Male	62	17
Age	17-22	327	89
	23-26	33	9
	26+	7	2
Birth Order	Only child	11	3
	First-born	142	39
	Middle-born	112	30
	Last-born	102	28
Parental Relationship Status	Parents living together	324	88
	Separated/Divorced	26	7
	Mother deceased	4	1
	Father deceased	13	4
Mother's Educational Level	Illiterate	38	11
	Primary school	178	49
	Middle school	32	10
	High school	66	18
	Associate degree/ Bachelor's degree/ Postgraduate	43	12
Father's Educational Level	Illiterate	3	1
	Primary school	100	28
	Middle school	78	22
	High school	104	29
	Associate degree/ Bachelor's degree/ Postgraduate	73	20
Perceived Socioeconomic Status	Female	37	10
	Male	352	96
	17-22	8	4
Childhood Place of Residence	23-26	58	18
	26+	96	27
	Only child	82	24
	First-born	111	31

Sample

The sample size included in the study was determined by taking into account criteria such as the ability to adequately represent the population and the need for a suitable sample size for the statistical analyses conducted. The sample size was determined based on methodological recommendations for structural equation modeling (SEM). Previous methodological studies suggest that a sample exceeding 200 participants generally provides sufficient statistical power for SEM analyses involving latent variables. Accordingly, the sample consisting of 367 university students was considered adequate to test the proposed mediation model.

The study tested a structural equation model comprising three latent variables and a total of six indicator variables representing these variables. The most comprehensive regression equation in the structural part of the model was used as the basis for determining the required sample size, and an a priori power analysis was carried out using the G*Power 3.1.9.7 software. Based on two predictor variables, a significance level of .05 and a statistical power of .95, the required minimum sample size was calculated as 360.

University years are a developmental period during which an individual's psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships and cognitive assessments of the future are significantly shaped (Arnett 2000). For this reason, the study sample consisted of university students. To be eligible for inclusion in the study, participants were required to be aged 18 or over, to be actively enrolled in university education, and to voluntarily complete the online data collection tools in full. Within the scope of the study, data from individuals who did not provide informed consent, who completed the data collection form incompletely or inconsistently, or who did not meet the specified sample criteria were excluded from the analysis. As a result of these procedures, the analyses were conducted using data obtained from 367 participants who met the study criteria. In this context, data obtained from 23 individuals were not included in the study. This approach was adopted to ensure that the sample was more homogeneous in terms of specific characteristics and to minimise external factors that could influence the relationships between the variables of positive childhood experiences, hope and happiness examined in the study (Büyüköztürk et al. 2018).

A total of 367 university students participated in this study, comprising 305 (83%) women and 62 (17%) men. The mean age of the students participating in the study was calculated as 20.69 ± 3.06. The distribution of participants according to demographic variables and their percentage values are presented in Table 1. (Table 1)

Procedure

This research was conducted online in 2025 with university students enrolled at the Faculty of Education, Necmettin Erbakan University. The data collection process was carried out following approval from the ethics committee, and participants were informed of the study's purpose, that participation was voluntary, and that personal information would be kept confidential. The online data collection form used in the study was prepared by the researchers and administered via a secure electronic survey system.

No personal identification details were requested from participants, and all data were collected anonymously. The data obtained were stored in a password-protected electronic environment accessible only to the researchers, and care was taken to ensure the reliability and confidentiality of the data. The procedures were carried out by the study's researchers. Participants were presented with an informed consent form; students who gave their consent completed the data collection tools online. No third parties, institutional staff or commercial organisations were involved in the data collection process.

The online data collection form used in the study comprised standard scales and a demographic information form. No changes were made to the scale items; the wording in both the original and the Turkish adaptation forms was retained. Prior to commencing the data collection process, the online form was technically checked by the researchers to ensure link accessibility, page navigation, the functionality of mandatory fields, compatibility with mobile and desktop devices, and that data was being recorded correctly.

The study was announced through university student communication groups and social media platforms (WhatsApp and Instagram). Participants were invited with a brief message explaining the aim of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, anonymity, and the approximate completion time. All questionnaire items were set as mandatory; therefore, participants could not submit the survey with missing responses. Participants were allowed to review and change their answers before final submission.

The survey consisted of 4 screens and 37 items in total, and completion required approximately 8-10 minutes. No financial or material incentive was provided. The questionnaires collected during the data collection process were reviewed, and the responses from 23 participants whose questionnaires were incomplete or did not meet the evaluation criteria were excluded from the analysis. Following this, the research was conducted using data obtained from 367 participants. To prevent multiple submissions, the survey platform restricted responses to one submission per Google account, and duplicate entries were checked based on response timestamps and identical demographic patterns.

Measures

Demographic Information Form

The Demographic Information Form consists of questions regarding age, gender, birth order, parents' educational status, perceived socioeconomic level, and the type of settlement where childhood was spent.

Positive Childhood Experiences Scale

The Positive Childhood Experiences Scale was first developed by Bethell et al. (2019). The scale is a 7-item Likert scale designed to assess positive childhood experiences from birth up to the age of 18. The Positive Childhood Experiences Scale measures the presence of positive experiences within the family, safe and supportive family interactions, sources of social support, and a sense of belonging and social participation. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Çiçek and Çeri (2021). The scale's Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .78, and the Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient was .71. According to the results of exploratory factor analysis, the correlation coefficients between items ranged from .271 to .579. The fit indices obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis results were calculated as χ^2/df = 2.25; RMSEA = .076; NFI = .96; IFI = .96; CFI = .97; GFI = .97; AGFI = .92; RMR = .76. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was calculated as 0.69.

The General Hope Scale

Developed by Snyder et al. (1991) to measure levels of general hope in individuals aged 15 and over. The scale comprises 12 items and two subscales: 'Pathways Thinking' and 'Agency Thinking'. The internal consistency coefficients for the scale were found to be between .71 and .76 for 'Agency Thinking' and between .63 and .80 for 'Pathways Thinking'. For the total scale, internal consistency coefficients were observed to range between .74 and .84. The reliability coefficients of the scale were determined using the test-retest method. Values of .85 were obtained with a 3-week interval, .73 with an 8-week interval, and .76 with a 10-week interval. The Continuous Hope Scale was adapted into Turkish by Tarhan and Bacanlı (2015). The scale's Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated as .83 and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value as .86. As a result of confirmatory factor analysis, the fit indices were calculated as GFI = .96, AGFI = .92, RMR = .08, NNFI = .94, RFI = .90, CFI = .96 and RMSEA = .077. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .80 for the Pathways Thinking subscale and .73 for the Agency Thinking subscale.

Oxford Happiness Scale Short Form

The scale was originally developed by Hills and Argyle (2002). It consists of 8 items and is a 5-point Likert-type scale. The Turkish translation was carried out by Doğan and Akıncı Çötok (2011). A high score on the scale indicates an increased level of happiness. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted during the scale adaptation process to examine construct validity. It was determined that, like the original form of the scale, it has a single dimension. The fit indices for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were reported as χ^2 = 36.05, df = 13, AGFI = 0.93, GFI = 0.97, NFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.95, IFI = 0.95, RMR = 0.044, and RMSEA = 0.074. The results of the internal consistency and test-retest analyses conducted to test the scale's reliability were found to be .74 and .85, respectively. Based on the results of the reliability tests, the scale was found to be a reliable measurement tool for assessing an individual's level of happiness (Doğan and Akıncı Çötok 2011). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Oxford Happiness Scale Short Form was calculated as .79.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 software. First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values) were calculated for positive childhood experiences, hope, and happiness. The normality of the variables was evaluated through skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between positive childhood experiences, total hope scores, hope sub-dimensions (Pathways Thinking and Agency Thinking), and

happiness. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was then conducted to test the hypothesized mediation model in which hope mediated the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness. Direct, indirect, and total effects were estimated using the bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. A significance level of $p < .05$ was accepted for all analyses. Prior to the mediation analysis, correlations between the variables were examined; given that the hope variable was represented in the structural model through parcels formed from its sub-dimensions, it was determined that the high correlations among the sub-dimensions did not pose a multicollinearity problem.

The mediating model proposed in the study was tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine the mediating role of hope in the effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness. In the model, positive childhood experiences were defined as the independent variable, happiness as the dependent variable, and hope as the mediating variable.

The hope variable was represented by parcel indicators derived from the scores on the two sub-dimensions of the Continuous Hope Scale: 'thinking of alternative paths' and 'agent-oriented thinking'. The parceling procedure was chosen to ensure that multi-item constructs are represented in a more reliable and balanced manner, to reduce measurement error, and to enable the structural model to produce more robust estimates. Accordingly, the items relating to hope were grouped into parcels, taking into account the sub-dimension structure, and were used as indicators of the latent variable in the structural model.

During the analysis process, the measurement model was first tested to assess whether the latent variables were adequately represented by the observed indicators. Once the measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit indices, the structural model was established; direct pathways from positive childhood experiences to hope, from hope to happiness, and from positive childhood experiences to happiness were tested within the same model. The significance of the mediating effect was assessed using the bootstrap method. To this end, 5,000 resamples were conducted and 95 per cent confidence intervals for the indirect effects were calculated.

Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study. An examination of the mean and standard deviation values for the scales reveals that the participants' levels of positive childhood experiences, hope, and happiness vary within the sample. Furthermore, the fact that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fall within acceptable limits indicates that the data meet the assumption of normal distribution (Table 2).

Table 2. Scores obtained from the Positive Childhood Experiences, Hope and Happiness scales

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Positive Childhood Experiences	7	35	24.43	4.50	-.37	.41
Happiness	7	35	23.59	4.56	-.31	.31
Pathways Thinking	12	32	24.83	3.79	-.35	.36
Agency Thinking	10	32	23.18	3.85	-.25	.53
Hope	21	56	41.10	6.10	-.27	.44

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficients (r) between variables

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1. Positive Childhood Experiences	-				
2. Happiness	.52**	-			
3.Hope	.37**	.64**	-		
4.Pathways Thinking	.24**	.51**	.87**	-	
5.Agency Thinking	.43**	.65**	.93**	.66**	-

Table 3 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis regarding the relationships between the variables. The findings indicate the existence of positive and statistically significant relationships among positive childhood experiences, hope, and happiness. In Table 3, high correlation coefficients were

observed between the total hope score and its sub-dimensions. However, this stems from the fact that the total hope score is derived from the sub-dimensions of the same scale. Since the hope variable was represented as a single latent variable in the structural equation model—using parcels constructed from the sub-dimensions—these high correlations were not considered a multicollinearity problem for the model (Table 3).

A measurement model was constructed for the structural equation model comprising the variables of positive childhood experiences, hope and happiness, and the fit indices were found to be CMIN/DF = 2.00, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.89 and RMSEA = 0.052. These values indicate that the measurement model provides adequate fit. The overall fit of the structural model, however, exhibits higher values (CMIN/DF = 2.89, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.95, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.080). Accordingly, it is evident that the model aligns consistently with the data (Figure 1).

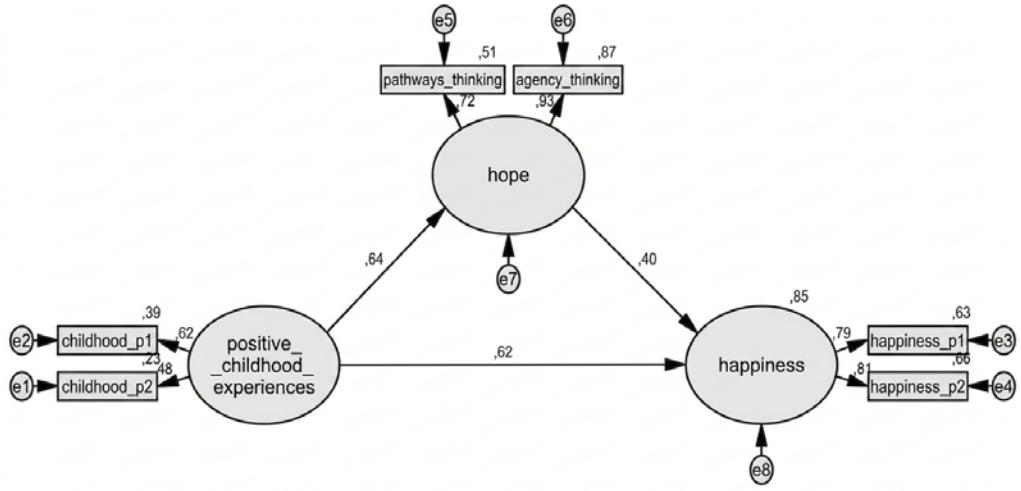


Figure 1. Mediating role of hope in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness

Based on the results of the mediation analysis conducted using the bootstrap method, it was determined that the direct effect of positive childhood experiences on hope was positive and statistically significant (β = .64, 95% Bootstrap CI [.50, .78], p < .001). Furthermore, the direct effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness was found to be significant (β = .62, 95% Bootstrap CI [.40, .96], p < .001). The direct effect of hope on happiness was also found to be positive and significant (β = .40, 95% Bootstrap CI [.03, .59], p < .001). The indirect effect analysis revealed that the indirect effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness through hope was significant (β = .25, 95% Bootstrap CI [.09, .38]). The fact that the bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero indicates that the indirect effect was statistically significant. Regarding the total effect, it was determined that the total effect of positive childhood experiences on happiness was significant (β = .87, 95% Bootstrap CI [.74, 1.02], p < .001). The finding that the direct effect remained significant while the indirect effect was also significant via bootstrap analysis indicates that hope plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness. (Table 4)

Table 4. Findings on mediating role of hope in between positive childhood experiences and happiness

Model	β	Lower Limit (95% CI)	Upper Limit (95% CI)	p
Direct Effects	.642	.502	.779	<.001
Positive Childhood Experiences → Hope	.619	.399	.961	<.001
Positive Childhood Experiences → Happiness	.395	.033	.586	<.001
Hope → Happiness				
Indirect Effect	.254	.091	.375	
Positive Childhood Experiences → Hope → Happiness				
Total Effect	.873	.742	1.024	<.001

* β = standardized path coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Indirect effects were estimated using the bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples. An indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the 95% confidence interval does not include zero

Discussion

A statistically significant positive correlation was found between positive childhood experiences—the dependent variable of the study—and happiness—the independent variable. Furthermore, a similar relationship was observed between hope—the mediating variable—and both happiness and positive childhood experiences. In this regard, it is assessed that as an individual's score on the positive childhood experiences scale increases, their scores on the hope and happiness scales also increase. The findings obtained in the study have been discussed in the light of the literature.

The first of the research findings indicates a significant positive relationship between the positive experiences an individual had during childhood—such as family support, a safe environment, a sense of belonging, positive memories, and a sense of social participation—and their level of hope in adulthood. This finding reveals that individuals who perceive their needs as having been met and themselves as emotionally supported during early life possess higher levels of hope. Furthermore, it suggests that individuals with high levels of hope may exhibit stronger cognitive-motivational characteristics regarding goal setting and the pursuit of those goals. Indeed, in the study by Ünal and Traş (2025), the mediating role of hope in the relationship between university students' positive childhood experiences and career planning was examined. One of the research findings indicates a positive and significant relationship between positive childhood experiences and hope. Polat and Aliyev's (2024) study also concluded that childhood experiences significantly predict levels of hope. Although there are very few studies examining the relationship between positive childhood experiences and hope, it is noteworthy that the findings of this study are consistent with those of our own research.

One of the findings of our study demonstrates that there is a positive and significant relationship between positive childhood experiences and subjective well-being. This finding indicates that individuals who report more positive experiences during childhood possess higher levels of happiness. The study by Doğan and Aydın (2021) examined whether happy children become happy adults. According to the research findings, it was emphasised that individuals with positive childhood experiences had higher scores for happiness and life satisfaction. On the other hand, it was stated that individuals with high levels of happiness had more positive childhood experiences.

One of the findings of the research is that there is a positive and significant relationship between hope and happiness. In the study by Cihangir Çankaya and Meydan (2018), the levels of happiness and hope among adolescents were examined, and it was concluded that hope significantly predicts happiness. In another study encountered in the literature, variables predicting university students' subjective well-being were examined, and it was observed that hope is positively and directly related to subjective well-being (Dursun 2021). In Murphy's (2023) study, it was emphasised that hope increases subjective well-being. It has been stated that this finding remains valid during the pandemic period; furthermore, it has been noted that hope positively influences subjective well-being across individuals of different ages. A literature review examining the relationship between the two variables revealed that the findings are consistent with the studies reviewed.

The findings of the mediation model indicate that the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness is partially explained by the hope variable. This finding suggests that childhood experiences may be related to an individual's cognitive-emotional resources regarding the future. Indeed, in the study by Gallagher and Lopez (2009), it was found that individuals with high levels of hope had significantly higher levels of life satisfaction and positive affect, whilst negative affect was lower.

Positive childhood experiences include elements such as emotional support, the fulfilment of basic psychological needs, living in a safe environment and feeling a sense of belonging, secure attachment, and the care and kindness shown by those around them. Such experiences play a decisive role in the formation of an individual's self-perception and cognitive schemas regarding the world. Individuals who spend their childhood in a supportive and secure family environment tend to perceive themselves as valuable and capable; they also view the challenges they face as manageable and see them as opportunities to find new

ways of coping. This framework offers an opportunity for the development of positive expectations regarding the future.

The finding that hope plays a partial mediating role in the study aligns with the results of international research published in recent years. Current studies indicate that the impact of positive childhood experiences on psychological well-being can be explained not only directly but also through hope, psychological resilience, and other positive psychological resources (Sever et al. 2024, Akbulut 2026). Similarly, longitudinal studies demonstrate that positive childhood experiences foster emotional and behavioral adjustment in later life and that this effect is linked to the individual's psychological resources (Sousa et al. 2026). Accordingly, these findings support the theoretical expectation that the level of hope may serve as an explanatory psychological mechanism in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness.

The finding that hope plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness appears theoretically significant when evaluated within the framework of Snyder's Hope Theory. The theory posits that the construct of hope is formed by the combination of an individual's motivation to achieve goals and their capacity to devise pathways to attain those goals (Snyder 2002). It is noted that individuals who experience reassuring, supportive, and accepting interactions during childhood are more likely to develop these cognitive-motivational resources (Lopez et al. 2004). Accordingly, hope can be considered a key psychological resource that helps explain the link between positive early-life experiences and happiness. However, due to the study's cross-sectional design, it cannot be claimed that this relationship demonstrates a causal mechanism; the findings merely support the theoretically expected associations between the variables.

Positive experiences in childhood help to build an individual's sense of basic trust and perception of self-worth. This foundation, in turn, supports the development of a hopeful outlook towards the future. Hope, in turn, by activating goal-oriented cognitive processes and motivation towards life, strengthens both the cognitive (life satisfaction) and emotional (positive emotion) components of subjective well-being.

This study examined the mediating role of hope in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness. However, the research has certain limitations. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design; consequently, while the findings reveal relationships between the variables, they do not allow for inferences regarding causality. It is anticipated that future longitudinal and experimental studies will contribute to a more robust understanding of the directional and causal relationships between these variables. Furthermore, the data were collected using self-report scales, meaning the findings are limited to the participants' subjective assessments. The fact that the study was conducted exclusively with university students limits the generalizability of the findings to other age groups and populations. Additionally, the fact that the vast majority of the sample consisted of female participants can be considered another limitation of the study.

One limitation in this context is that the internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .69) of the Childhood Experiences Scale included in the study is close to the lower limit of acceptability. Although these figures do not preclude the use of the instrument, the potential impact of measurement errors on the interpretation of the findings should not be overlooked; therefore, it is important that future studies re-evaluate performance using different approaches.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness is partly explained by hope. This finding indicates that there are significant relationships between early positive experiences and an individual's future-oriented cognitive-emotional resources. Within the scope of the study's findings, hope was found to be a statistically significant mediating variable in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness. However, due to the cross-sectional design of the study, these associations should not be interpreted as causal. In future research, considering variables such as psychological resilience, self-compassion, meaning in life, social support

and attachment styles—which may play a role in the relationship between positive childhood experiences and happiness—in conjunction with one another could contribute to the development of more comprehensive models. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are important for examining the persistence over time of the effect of positive childhood experiences on hope. Experimental and intervention-based research, meanwhile, may reveal the impact of programmes designed to increase levels of hope on levels of happiness.

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