

Ontological Well-Being (Life Project) Ontolojik İyi-Oluş (Yaşam Projesi)

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Abstract

There has been an increase in the emphasis on the positive feelings and strengths of individuals in the mental health by the emergence of positive psychology approach. Subjective well-being, one of the most important concepts of positive psychology; that consists of life satisfaction, positive and negative emotional components, and is considered as an emotional and cognitive assessment of the individual's life. The concept of ontological well-being, apart from subjective well-being, focuses on the evaluation of one's own life as a project and is the evaluation of life with the consideration of the past, the future, and the present. In this review, "ontological well-being" will be examined in various dimensions as a contemporary subject and several suggestions will be presented to researchers who share this perspective.

Keywords: Ontological well-being, life project, positive psychology

Öz

Pozitif psikolojinin önemini vurgulamasıyla beraber psikolojik sağlık alanında kişilerin güçlü yanlarına ve pozitif duygularına odaklanma artmaya başlamıştır. Pozitif psikolojinin önemli kavramlarından birisi olan öznel iyi-oluş, yaşam doyumu, olumlu ve olumsuz duygu bileşenlerinden oluşmakta olup temel olarak bireyin yaşamına ilişkin duygusal ve bilişsel değerlendirmesi olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ontolojik iyi-oluş kavramı ise, öznel iyi-oluştan farklı olarak, kişinin kendi yaşamının bir proje olarak değerlendirilmesine odaklanan ve bu bağlamda geçmiş, gelecek ve şimdi ile beraber ele alınan yaşamın değerlendirilmesidir. Bu gözden geçirme çalışmasında, psikoloji alanında güncel bir konu olan "ontolojik iyi-oluş" kavramı çeşitli boyutlarıyla incelenmekte ve bu perspektifte araştırmacılar için bazı öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Ontolojik iyi-oluş, yaşam projesi, pozitif psikoloji

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IT was not until the half of the 20th century that positive emotions were deliberated in the science of psychology, because negative concepts such as depression and anxiety were mainly focused on. Within the last third decades, with the development of positive psychology insight, positive emotions have taken over and various psychological well-being oriented concepts were accentuated (Kaba et al. 2018). Positive psychology was proposed by Martin Seligman (1998). After World War II, the approach of psychology to the human being adopted a medical model to a great extent and the science of psychology ignored the individual's strengths. (Seligman 2002). It can be seen from the historical process that positive psychology began developing at the end of the 1990s. Important subjects which positive psychology is concerned can be summarized as; well-being, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, capacity building, forgiveness, awareness, spirituality, responsibility, altruism, professional ethics and happiness (trans. Eryılmaz 2017). The science of psychology has diverted its path to study the individual's strengths, positive personality traits, and competencies, in short, by revealing one's strengths and supporting these attributes. By strengthening these attributes, it endeavors developing happier, healthier and more successful individuals both in their daily lives and careers (Luthans 2002).

Positive psychology classifies positive approaches in three main groups. These are; well-being and life satisfaction which are based on the past; happiness and hope which are based on the present; third and at last, optimism (trns. Küsgülü 2014). Positive psychology also classifies the state of well-being into three different subjects. These are subjective, individual and group terms. The subjective term consists of positive experiences and situations which are based on the past, the present and the future such as happiness, optimism, and well-being. The Individual term focuses on the question "How to become a good person?" in the contexts of wisdom, love, and creativity. The group term examines positive formations and communities in the context of altruism, tolerance, forgiveness and professional ethics. As it can be inferred from these classifications, positive psychology is not solely based on the individual. On the contrary, it aims to create experimental life situations and stimulate positive emotions in order to increase both personal development and the state of well-being (trans. Küsgülü 2014).

It can be observed that the concept of well-being is defined as "a way of life that aims to improve the functioning of the person in physical, psychological and social dimensions" (Dogan 2006). Studies on the state of well-being have begun with Dr. Halbert Dunn in 1961. Other theoreticians (Jourard 1963, Maslow 1968, Jourard 1971, Arden 1977, Hettler 1980, Travis 1981, Arden 1982, Hind 1983, Hettler 1984, Travis and Ryan 1988) have formed the theoretical framework of the state of well-being (trans. Dogan 2006). The common conception that all theoreticians share is that the state of well-being is a lifestyle in which an individual plays an active role in determining the level of well-being. Dunn (1959) defines well-being as a method of functioning and being complete by utilizing the potential of the individuals at the highest level in the environment they live in (trans. Kayış 2017). Myers et al. (2000) describe well-being as a way of life which orients an optimal state of health where the body, the mind, and the soul meet so that the individual can live in their social and natural environment, and the state of being well (trans. Dogan 2006).

Subjective well-being, one of the important concepts of positive psychology; life satisfaction is composed of positive and negative emotion components and is considered as

a cognitive and emotional interpretation of the individual's life (Diener 1984). Subjective well-being is divided into two components, cognitive and emotional. The emotional component of subjective well-being consists of positive and negative emotions, whereas cognitive component consists of life satisfaction (Pavot et al. 1991, Diener 1994, Erol and Kaba 2018). The first two of these concepts explains emotional subjective well-being, the latter clarifies cognitive subjective well-being. Simsek (2009), however, alternatively proposed the concept of "ontological well-being", because operational estimates and definitions target one's general emotional life rather than their life, and in addition, it is not clear what is the meaning of life in terms of life satisfaction. Ontological well-being, apart from subjective well-being, is the evaluation of the individual's own life as a project and examined in this context together with "the past", "the future" and "the present".

As it can be observed, "ontological well-being" was introduced to the literature just as the concepts of the state of well-being and being well. This study aims to provide a source for the researchers in the positive psychology field, as no example of a literature review on relatively new "ontological well-being" was ever encountered. In this review, a contemporary subject in the science of psychology, "ontological well-being" will be examined in various aspects and some suggestions will be presented for the researchers.

Literature review of concept

The concept of well-being continues to be a research subject with increasing interest in the field of behavioral sciences and psychology and attracts the attention of many researchers after the last half of the 20th century. Researchers who aim to come up with an operational definition, have often associated the concept of "well-being" with such concepts of "happiness", "life quality" and "life satisfaction" (Diener, 1984, Pavot et al. 1991, Wan et al. 1996, Diener and Suh 1997, Wardle et al. 2004, Dost 2010, Ozgur et al. 2010, Tmkaya 2011, Erol and Kaba 2018).

After years of study, Ed Diener brought in a new perspective in the field of psychology in 1984. Diener (1984) has pointed out that subjective well-being has three distinctive attributes. It is primarily subjective, that is relative to the experiences of the person. Second, subjective well-being includes positive measurements. Not having negative factors in a person's life do not suffice, yet there must be positive factors as well. And the last, subjective well-being measurements include a general the individual's evaluation of their whole life. Satisfaction of a single aspect of any single moment in the person's life is an indicator of well-being but it is not sufficient alone.

Many definitions have been made about the concept of well-being in the literature to date. Today, there are two main types of well-being accepted by most researchers. These are "subjective well-being" and "psychological well-being". It is well known that subjective well-being emphasizes both negative and positive emotions, and satisfaction of life; whereas psychological well-being predicated on psychological functioning, that is the development of the individual (Dodge et al. 2012, Kocayoruk 2012). The emotional dimensions that emerged from the results of Bradburn's research on happiness show the positive and negative psychological state in one's life. This emotional dimension is now expressed as emotional well-being (Diener and Lucas 2000). According to the above statement, subjective well-being emphasizes the attributes of the human world. Psycho-

logical well-being; it includes ontological dimensions such as development, management and meaning (Diener 1984).

Yalom (1999) comments "The state of mindfulness of being, one marvels not about the way things are but that they are. To exist in this mode means to be continually aware of being. In this mode, which is often referred to as the "ontological mode," ... one remains mindful of being, not only mindful of the fragility of being but mindful, too, ... of one's responsibility for one's own being. Since it is only in this ... mode that one is in touch with one's self-creation, it is only here that one can grasp the power to change". As Yalom underlined, Ontological mode derives the word "ontos" which means "existence" in Greek. Ontological well-being is the closest structure to one's life project meaning of life or the purpose of life, which is one of the most fundamental quest and the life project of an individual. It is a life project of an individual within the framework of the purpose of life, which involves the past, the present and the future components (Kocayoruk et al. 2018). In general, individuals long for a happy life. The notion of happiness discussed together with subjective well-being in psychological researches. According to Hayborn (2000), subjective well-being is the evaluation and conclusion of one's self-life.

A person looking for meaning or purpose for their personal existence makes a narrative assessment of their own life (McAdams 2001). Human being generates its narrative assessment of well-being using completed (the past), ongoing (the present) and probable (the future) emotional conclusions. It is assumed that the individual considers every goal and project as a commentary of well-being or happiness and draws attention to the absolute good. Hence, individual happiness is the evaluation of the individual's own existence in an emotional and cognitive way (Simsek 2009). Therefore, it is assumed that every individual is thinking about his life and happiness and that each individual is a life project (Staudinger 2001, Shmotkin 2005). When individuals review the past life, they evaluate whether it was satisfactory or not; when they review the present life, they evaluate whether the purpose of life project remains and when they look into the future, they evaluate whether their project is positive or not. With this evaluation comes development, direction and happiness of self-fulfillment emerge. With this insight, Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013) described the concept of ontological well-being, a person's life project in other words, as the closest structure to the meaning or purpose of life, which is one of the most fundamental quests of individuals. Simsek (2009) used "ontological well-being" as an alternative to "subjective well-being" because of the fact that in the emotional dimension studied in the concept of subjective well-being, life satisfaction is not defined clearly, and one's emotional life and how they feel is examined rather than their life. Simsek (2009) has introduced ontological well-being to the literature by pointing out the relationship between emotional and cognitive dimensions are rather uncertain and the importance of the emotional dimension is neglected in the present time-oriented approach of the whole time frame in the theory of subjective well-being conceptualized by Diener et al. (1997).

Simsek (2009) suggested a new framework called ontological well-being for the cognitive and emotional evaluation of life, by considering the narrative point of view as a starting point. Ontological well-being is defined as an individual's assessment of their life project, considering the present and the future. In other words, ontological well-being known as life as a project is defined as a personal criterion in which individuals evaluate their lives. (Simsek and Kocayoruk, 2013). Subjective well-being has no fixed structure and it is accepted that life itself is meant (Simsek 2009). When the literature is

reviewed, one can observe that there is not a single well-being type. Since the time was considered as the most basic ontological category in the philosophical literature, this evaluation was named as ontological well-being. (Heidegger 1996).

Dimensions of concept

Past, future and present in the temporal plane, the past consists of emotions that vary according to the evaluation when the individual sees life as a project. This personal assessment can stimulate positive emotions such as pride, satisfaction, success; they can also revitalize the negativities such as frustration, inadequacy, and guilt (Santorini and Zuroff 1994, McAdams 2001, Lucas 2004, Simsek 2009). The present describes the life project that the person currently pursues and his/her motivation, perception and continuation of this project. When looked into from the present time point of view, ontological well-being corresponds to the state of being in progress, which is in itself and revealed by the individual. In this way, the present time can be considered as the motivation of the individual in order to continue his/her project. Higher the motivation, higher the attachment to his/her own project. In the context of the future, ontological well-being is closely related to being hopeful and is considered to be all of the optimistic feelings (Simsek 2009). "Regret" which is evaluated in ontological well-being, is characterized as an existential feeling about our past and the choices we made in the past (Lucas 2004).

The concept of "ontological well-being" encompasses dynamics such as regret or satisfaction about the past, meaninglessness or hope for the future and passivity, pleasure or activity for the present. Considering the future dimension, the word "future" generally stimulates happiness or sense of hope; hence the emotional characterization of this dimension is expressed by being hopeful about the future and looking forward. As a result, the positive mood of the person is related to his/her psychological well-being; a negative mood for the future is associated with an increased likelihood of failure in the future (McAdams 2001, Bauer et al. 2005). In temporal dimension, "the past" is recognized as negative emotions with positive emotions; "the present" is recognized as creating life and acting or "nothingness", realizing that no progress will be made. The future indicates only negative emotions. During their research, Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013) found out that "nothingness" factor is in a strong negative correlation with environmental superiority variables, and personal development aspect and in a strong positive correlation with negative mood. On the other hand, "hope" factor which is considered to be related to the future, has a strong positive correlation with an open-minded personality trait.

Ontological well-being is closely related to narrative psychology. Brown (1999) stated that assuming life as a story is closely related to the happiness of the individuals. Similarly, ontological well-being sees life as a story reflecting both future and past. In other words, individuals, as the authors of their lives, have personal stories only evaluated correctly and properly by themselves. Although the meaning of life and ontological well-being have the same existence concerns, the concept of ontological well-being is depicted in a unique and simple system that considers the subjective inference of the person who takes life. Ontological well-being also includes effective and cognitive life evaluations that are in all-time perspectives (Zika and Chamberlain 1992, Simsek 2011).

For the scope of the life project, it has been foreseen that the emotional assessment of the present life is based on ongoing activities and significant relationships with the environment. According to these criteria, positive or negative emotional evaluations in the

dimension of emotional evaluation of the present time are observed as the basic structure in the mood of the individual (Simsek 2009). The likelihood of having symptoms of depression is considered to be high for individuals that have more negative evaluations such as emptiness, purposelessness, lostness which compose the "nothingness" dimension of ontological well-being concept. During their scale development studies in which Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013) dealt with the relationship between ontological well-being and emotional, cognitive and environmental factors, they found out that "nothingness" is closely related to mood disorders such as depression and anxiety. Thus, ontological well-being, in other words, one's life project, can be expressed as the structure closest to the meaning or purpose of life, which is one of the most fundamental quests of individuals. As a result, ontological well-being refers to a life project which is created and sustained by a person from a narrative point of view including the past, present and future time components within the framework of the purpose of his / her own life (Kocayoruk et al. 2018).

It is well known that individuals evaluate their lives on the temporal plane (past, present, and future) and it is crucial for psychological well-being (Ryff and Heidrich 1997), happiness (Robinson and Ryff 1999), ego development (Bortner and Hultsch 1974) and ego integrity. It is seen that "regret" factor which is a component of ontological well-being is directly related to the past, and is an existential emotion related to our choices (Lucas 2004). Again, according to Santorini and Zuroff (1994), the feeling of regret and guilt in the past or in a satisfactory sense is very important in terms of psychological well-being. In addition to regrets, unfinished work is one of the important factors that affect an individual's mood and life (O'Leary and Nieuwstraten 2001, McAllister and Wolff 2002). Likewise, the motivation, excitement, and enthusiasm of the person in the present are very important for the evaluation. While the individual will remain engaged to his/her project when his/her motivation is high, ones with low or no motivation at all will see themselves in a dead end and feel lost, purposeless, unskillful and emptiness (Simsek 2009). Future dimension is related to being forward-looking and hopeful because it gives a hopeful and positive feeling for the person (Karniol and Ross 1996, McAdams 2001). And these positive feelings are directly related to the well-being of the individual (Bauer et al. 2005).

Measurement of ontological well-being

Ontological well-being scale (Life Project Scale) was developed by Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013) who introduced ontological well-being to the literature. Ontological Well-Being Scale (Life Project Scale) developed by Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013) aims to evaluate one's life project (ontological well-being) by evaluating past, present and future. It also consists of the emotional judgments of one's own projects (unfinished, i.e. "past" or "present" and possibly "future" feelings) in their life. The scale consists of four factors: "nothingness/meaninglessness", "hope", "regret" and "activation". Regrets, guilt and sadness items are scored in reverse. Pride, disappointment, satisfaction, regret, sadness, guilt and inadequacy are used to evaluate the past time project, are in meaninglessness factor. The fatigue, aimlessness, enthusiasm, being lost, energetic, motivated, excited, empty feeling, irresponsibility, helplessness and being anxious are the factors of activation and meaninglessness (nothingness). Finally, hope, strength, self-confidence, courage, feeling of the future, waiting and enthusiasm are the factors of hope used to evaluate

the future of the individual's life project (Simsek 2009, Simsek and Kocayoruk 2013).

When the ontological well-being scale factors are considered, the past includes both negative and positive emotions; the future covers only positive emotions. If an individual accepts the present time and thinks that no progress will be made, feeling of "nothingness" will emerge. "Acting" factor which describes the present situation is evaluated as the individual's motivation and stamina for creating her/his own life project, "regret" and "hope" factors, on the other hand, are composed of both positive and negative terms alongside with representing the future. According to Simsek and Kocayoruk's (2013) study, "nothingness" factor shows a strong negative correlation with "personal development" dimension and "environmental superiority" variables; it has a very strong positive correlation with "negative mood". Given the above situation, individuals who do not have the feeling of nothingness tend to have a less negative mood, greater control over their environment and see themselves as individuals with a purpose of life who keep developing personally. "Acting" factor has a high positive correlation with positive mood, environmental superiority, self-esteem, and extrovert personality. Hence, the study has concluded that individuals who feel acting upon their life projects enjoy being social and have greater control over their environment as well as tending to have a positive mood. When one observes the past section of the life projects, the factor of "regret" has a strong negative correlation with environmental superiority, self-esteem, and negative mood. According to the findings of the study, it is concluded that individuals who have a positive feeling about their past accept themselves easier, tend to have less negative mood and are able to control their environment better when compared to those who have a negative mood. Finally, the factor of "hope" which composes the future section of life project, has a high positive correlation with being open-minded. The literature supports the fact that having a positive attitude against the future brings being open to new experiences and is directly related to psychological well-being (Prenda and Lachman 2001).

Research findings related with concept

Being relatively a new concept, the number of studies on ontological well-being continues to increase. After ontological well-being was first conceptualized, various researchers (Mohammed et al. 2010, Chen et al. 2012, Dogan and Sapmaz 2012, Lipowski 2012, Barczyk et al. 2014, Linton et al. 2016) mentioned the concept of ontological well-being in their studies. There are studies which concern the relationship between ontological well-being and various variables in mental health as well. In this context, it is possible to encounter several kinds of research on ontological well-being. Some of these are presented below.

According to findings of the study on the effect of early maladaptive schemas on depression through ontological well-being variable; out of 14 early maladaptive schemas, seeking approval, social isolation, privilege, failure, pessimism, emotional deprivation, and self-sacrifice were all related to depression through ontological well-being. It was observed that ontological well-being factors such as nothingness, acting, hope, and regret are also related to depression, regret and nothingness are predominant factors (Kuzu-Tascı 2014). According to Shmothin et al. (2006), ontological well-being is explained by two important sub-representations of mood which are negative and positive. Negative mood was positively correlated with factors of 'nothingness' and 'regret'. In a similar study, the ontological well-being sub-dimensions and the five-factor personality were

compared and the strongest relationship of the neuroticism was found to be 'nothingness' (Simsek and Kocayoruk 2013).

In Acıkgöz and Karaoğlu's (2016) study, it is aimed to investigate the negative effects of traumatic experiences in human life as a project and to what extent these effects play an intermediary role on depression. According to the results of the study, it was found that factors such as "meaninglessness, hope, regret, and activity" intermediates depression in individuals who were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In another study, the reasons behind adolescents who were pushed to committing crimes, their psychological varieties and effects of their mothers on committing crimes. According to the results, it was found out that there is an intermediary effect of basic psychological needs and sense of uniqueness in the relationship between ontological well-being of mothers of the adolescents who were pushed to committing crimes and the children's self-control level. The mothers' ontological well-being is directly related to their offspring's sense of uniqueness; the offspring's personal sense of uniqueness is directly related to basic psychological needs and self-control; the offspring's basic psychological needs are directly related to their self-control. In this context, it was observed that the mothers of children who were pushed to committing crimes had an indirect effect on the ontological well-being level and the self-control levels of these children (Tuncel 2016).

In his research, Yaman-Karahan (2016) examined the effect of university students' life goals, emotional well-being, fears of personal death and sensitive love levels on ontological well-being. As a result; gender, sensitive love, emotional well-being, and the purpose of life have a predictive effect on ontological well-being and found that fear of personal death has no effect on ontological well-being. According to the results of Dogan's (2017) study on the effect of attachment on depression and the relationship between ontological well-being and emotional intelligence tool variables, it was observed that attachment was associated with depression through ontological well-being and emotional intelligence.

In another study, the relationship between ontological well-being (life project), emotional well-being, the purpose of life and sensitive love is discussed. Cluster analyses showed a three-factor profile. In the first profile, high hopes and actions against low regret and nothingness (future-oriented profile); in the second, there was a high level of regret and a feeling of nothingness (losing profile) in response to low hope and action. In the final profile (balanced profile), moderate ontological well-being was shown. When the differences between these three profiles were examined, a statistically significant difference was discovered between emotional well-being, life goal and sensitive love scores (Kocayoruk et al. 2018).

In Sahin's (2018) study on "the effect of language use on depression, ontological well-being, and emotional intelligence", it was discovered that ontological well-being and emotional intelligence has an intermediary role in the background of the relationship between language use and depression. In addition, a significant relationship was found between ontological well-being and unspoken experiences. Sub-dimensions of ontological well-being such as "nothingness, regret, hope, and action" were found to be associated with depression. Another finding of the study is that there is a relationship between the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence and the sub-dimensions of ontological well-being. All sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence and "nothingness" and "regret"

sub-dimensions of ontological well-being have negative correlation; whereas "hope" and "action" have a positive correlation.

According to Senol's (2018) research on whether ontological well-being and emotional intelligence have an intermediary relationship on the effects of need for absolute reality on depression; the need for absolute reality is in a positive correlation with "action" and "hope". According to another finding of the study, there was a positive relationship between the 'regret' and 'nothingness' sub-dimensions and depression, while there was a negative relationship between the 'action' and 'hope' and the three sub-dimensions of depression.

Finally, Tilbe and Konur (2018) examined the intermediary role of ontological well-being between substance abusers' life positions and depressions, they found out statistically significant data. A negative correlation was found between the depression and "I'm OK - You're OK" and a positive correlation was found between "I'm not OK - You're OK" and these relationships were seen to be mediated by the concept of ontological well-being. Life positions of "I'm OK - You're OK" and "I'm not OK - You're OK" have a significant correlation with ontological well-being subdimensions of "nothingness, regret, and activation".

As can be inferred from the above studies and discoveries, there have been researches on the concept of ontological well-being mainly in Turkey and in the Turkish language in the literature. Conducted among various groups and several variables, these studies indicate that ontological well-being is a structure that affects depression and emotional intelligence, there can be several variables in this regard; and ontological well-being itself is a variable that can contribute significantly to educational, professional and family life of the individuals.

Conclusion

The fact that individuals have attributes that prevent physical and psychological disorders is an important feature of positive psychotherapies (Singh and Choubisa 2009, Eryılmaz 2017). At this point, it can be observed that there are various preventive and developing studies in Turkey that are conducted in the context of positive psychotherapy (Eryılmaz 2011, Malkoç 2011, Eryılmaz 2012, Ilgaz 2018). In the future, we may see various preventive and developing studies that focus on positive psychology approaches.

Ontological well-being is contemporarily attraction attention with the possibility of new researches and discoveries. Although the concept of ontological well-being in the literature has recently been introduced by Simsek and Kocayoruk (2013), and it is still on a theoretical level that has not yet been applied, there are very few researches in this field. Studies on what variables the concept may be related to may be considered to contribute to the relevant literature and may contribute to the development of ontological well-being.

The concept of ontological well-being has been studied in contexts and levels such as depression, emotional intelligence, the need for absolute reality, language use, life positions, five-factor model of personality, attachment, perceived parenting style, purpose of life, emotional well-being, negative self-relationship and early maladaptive schemas in the literature (Simsek and Kocayoruk 2013, Kuzu and Tascı 2014, Acıkgoz and Karaoglu 2016, Tuncel 2016, Yaman and Karahan 2016, Dogan 2017, Kocayoruk et al. 2018, Sahin 2018, Senol 2018, Tilbe and Konur 2018). Many of the studies have shown

that ontological well-being is a feature that is reliably measurable, open for development and contributes positively to the mental health of individuals. It can be concluded that the subject which is widely studied in Turkey is yet to be addressed adequately outside of Turkey. In this context, it is suggested that it would be beneficial to work on ontological well-being as a mood, a personality tendency or life orientation with individuals of different age groups and develop related intervention programs.

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