

# Relationship Between Relative Deprivation and Well-Being of Women: Role of Gender System Justification

## *Kadınların Görelî Yoksunlukları ve İyi Oluşları Arasındaki İlişkide Cinsiyet Sistemini Meşrulaştırmanın Rolü*

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### ABSTRACT

Subjective well-being is defined as individuals' evaluations of their happiness. Exposure to discrimination is a factor that negatively affects one's subjective well-being. Recent research indicated that women who are exposed to gender discrimination are affected negatively in terms of their subjective well-being. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between women's perception of gender-based relative deprivation and their subjective well-being and the mediator role of the tendency to justify the gender system in this relationship. The sample consisted of 328 voluntary female participants. The participants completed questionnaires, including Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), Gender System Justification Scale, Relative Deprivation Scale, and Demographic Information Form. Obtained results indicated that as the gender-based relative deprivation increased, the level of subjective well-being decreased ( $B = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ). Moreover, the gender system justification mediated the relationship between gender-based relative deprivation and women's subjective well-being levels [lower limit (LL) CI:  $-0.1956$ , upper limit (UL) CI:  $-0.0209$ ]. In conclusion, women who believe that they are subjected to gender-based discrimination may question the existing gender system in the society and in this framework, their subjective well-being levels are likely to decrease.

**Keywords:** Gender, gender system justification, relative deprivation, subjective well-being

### ÖZ

Öznel iyi oluş, bireylerin kendi mutluluklarına ilişkin değerlendirmeleri olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Ayrımcılığa maruz kalmak kişinin öznel iyi oluşunu olumsuz etkileyen bir faktördür. Yakın zamanda yapılan araştırmalar, cinsiyet ayrımcılığına maruz kalan kadınların öznel iyi oluş düzeylerinin olumsuz etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, kadınların cinsiyete dayalı görelî yoksunluk algıları ile öznel iyi oluşları arasındaki ilişkiyi ve bu ilişkide cinsiyet sistemini meşrulaştırma eğiliminin aracı rolünü incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu araştırmanın örneklemini 328 kadın gönüllü katılımcı oluşturmuştur. Katılımcılara Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği (SWLS), Olumlu ve Olumsuz Duygular Ölçeği (PANAS), Cinsiyet Sistemini Meşrulaştırma Ölçeği, Göreceli Yoksunluk Ölçeği ve Demografik Bilgi Formu' nu içeren anket uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, cinsiyete dayalı görelî yoksunluk arttıkça öznel iyi oluş düzeyinin azaldığını göstermiştir ( $B = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ). Ayrıca, toplumsal cinsiyet sistemi gerekçesi, cinsiyete dayalı görelî yoksunluk ile kadınların öznel iyi oluş düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık etmiştir [alt sınır (LL) CI:  $-0.1956$ , üst sınır (UL) CI:  $-0.0209$ ]. Sonuç olarak cinsiyet temelli ayrımcılığa maruz kaldığına inanan kadınların toplumdaki mevcut cinsiyet sistemini sorgulayabileceği ve bu çerçevede öznel iyi oluş düzeylerinin azaldığı düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsiyet sistemini meşrulaştırma, görelî yoksunluk, öznel iyi oluş

## Introduction

Worldwide, approximately one-third of women are reported to be exposed to physical or sexual violence (WHO 2019). Numerous studies reveal that women are in a disadvantageous position in terms of opportunities and rights compared to men. They are exposed to various forms of discrimination (Jaffee et al. 2016, Kollamparambil and Razak 2016, Wellalage and Locke 2017, SteelFisher et al. 2019) and violence (Hadi 2017). Several studies (Castano et al. 2019, Gonzalez et al. 2019) showed that women are exposed to various discriminatory practices depending on gender stereotypes. The gender-based discrimination may also affect women's perceptions about gender roles and systems (Snizek and Neil 1992, Monteith and Hildebrand 2020). Gender discrimination that

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women experience at both the social and individual level may lead to the experience of gender-based relative deprivation. Perceptions of relative deprivation have the potential to influence women's perceptions of the gender system and their well-being (Osborne and Sibley 2013, Abrams et al. 2020).

The concept of relative deprivation, first mentioned by Stouffer et al. (1949, as cited in Walker and Smith 2002), refers to the belief that one's own group is worse off compared to other groups. Relative deprivation is the result of individuals comparing themselves or their group with other individuals or groups. In other words, relative deprivation is an individual's perception that they or their group are not in a deserved position but are in a more disadvantaged position compared to others (Walker and Smith 2002, Kırıl 2009). Gender-based relative deprivation is a concept that refers to how women or men view their gender-related position in society, including the level of gender discrimination they perceive. Individuals with a perception of relative deprivation may experience feelings of anger, sadness and injustice due to their perceived disadvantaged position (Smith et al. 2012). Research shows that the perception of relative deprivation is closely related to people's well-being (Leites and Ramos 2022, Lilly et al. 2023).

Discrimination based on gender significantly threatens women's physical and mental health as well as their well-being. Research supports that exposure to discrimination, violence, and inequalities not only harm women's physical health (Hackett et al. 2019, Dawson et al. 2021) but also their psychological well-being and self-esteem (Kucharska 2017, Kim and Park 2018). One of the significant consequences of gender discrimination towards women is lower subjective well-being. Subjective well-being is an individual's cognitive and emotional evaluations of happiness (Diener et al. 2003). In other words, it is a psychological construct about how individuals feel and think about their own lives (Maddux 2018). It is a multidimensional structure evaluated by life satisfaction and negative and positive affect (Turan 2019). Several studies (Brodski and Hutz 2012, Avidor et al. 2016, Gil da Silva and Dell'Aglio 2016, Vukojevic et al. 2016, Douglass et al. 2017) indicate negative relationship between subjective well-being and exposure to discrimination, violence, and inequalities.

Feeling "more deprived" than others, either individually or as a member of a group, may be detrimental to one's subjective well-being. Abrams et al. (2020) reported that individual relative deprivation directly and negatively predicted subjective well-being, while collective relative deprivation negatively predicted subjective well-being through perceived discrimination. Similarly, D'Abrosio and Frick (2004) indicated that subjective well-being is negatively related to the perception of relative deprivation. Moreover, Wang and VanderWeele (2011), examining the variables predicting subjective well-being, supported that relative deprivation levels predict subjective well-being.

In the context of gender, the disadvantaged position also negatively affects the subjective well-being of women who are exposed to gender discrimination. For instance, a study showed that workplace discrimination is negatively related to women's subjective well-being (Tost et al. 2020). Similarly, Mudi and Waswa (2018) reported a significant relationship between women's representation in parliament and female participants' subjective well-being. Moreover, a study conducted in Latin America showed that women's levels of subjective well-being were significantly lower than men's due to workplace discrimination, inequality between wages, and traditional and conservative attitudes towards women (Lever 2004). A study carried out in Turkey also found that the gender discrimination perceived by women negatively predicts their life satisfaction as one of the subjective well-being indicators (Avcı 2013). Although a considerable amount of research supported women's perceptions about gender discrimination may play a significant role in their subjective well-being, limited research specifically draws attention to the relationship between women's gender-based relative deprivation and subjective well-being.

Perceptions of their gender as relatively disadvantaged may also influence women's justification of the gender system. System justification is broadly defined as a psychological process that contributes to the preservation of existing social systems (such as economic and political systems, power and status relations, resource, and role distributions) even at the expense of one's individual or group interests (Jost and Banaji 1994). Gender system justification, a specific form of system justification, refers to supporting and legitimizing the inequality between women and men and justifying the perpetuation of gender perceptions (Jost and Kay 2005, Sezen 2019). Stereotypes about women and men justify the gender system and promote maintenance of men's advantageous and superior position as well as women's disadvantaged and low status (Jost and Kay 2005).

Gender-based relative deprivation may have an impact on gender system justification and legitimation of gender roles. Situations such as discriminatory behaviors, negative discourse, violence and inequality of opportunity that women are exposed to may lead to changes in their perceptions of the gender system. Justifying the gender system may be challenging for a woman who experiences gender inequality and believes that women are in a disadvantageous position in society comparing to men. Relative deprivation may lead women to question the

gender system. Research supported that individuals' perceptions of gender discrimination (Monteith and Hildebrand 2020) and inequality (Willis et al. 2015) are associated with system justification.

Although the research on the association between relative deprivation and system justification is quite limited, there are some related studies that may support this issue. Kus et al. (2014) found a negative relationship between the perception of relative deprivation and legitimizing status in their research. Another study also reported a negative relationship between the ethnic group-based relative deprivation perception and the system justification levels (Osborne and Sibley 2013). Moreover, Abrams and Grant (2012) suggested that the beliefs about the changeability of the social system mediate the relationship between the participants' perceptions of relative deprivation and depression. The relationship between women's perceptions of gender-based relative deprivation and gender system justification, however, still needs to be examined. The relationship between relative deprivation and system justification, specifically in the gender context, may be beneficial for the research on this issue.

Gender system justification has also a potential to influence women's subjective well-being. Jost and Banaji (2004) proposed that system justification reduces the dissatisfaction of both advantaged and disadvantaged group members about their position and provides them to feel better. However, studies examining the relationships between subjective well-being and system justification show contradictory findings. Some studies conducted on this issue (Rankin et al. 2009, Harding and Sibley 2013) indicate that system justification is negatively related to individuals' subjective well-being. On the other hand, some research findings (Vargas-Salfate et al. 2018, Suppes et al. 2019, Li et al. 2020) indicated that the system justification and the levels of subjective well-being are positively related. There is also no consensus about the relationship between the tendency to justify the gender system and the levels of subjective well-being. Napier et al. (2020) reported that women's denial of gender discrimination positively affected their subjective well-being. Napier et al. (2010), however, suggested the relationship between the levels of justification of gender inequality and the subjective well-being of men and women vary across countries.

Considering the supporting literature and the limited research on the related topic in the context of gender, we aim to investigate the relationships between the gender-based relative deprivation, gender system justification and subjective well-being of women within the framework of a model. Although, there are some research examining the relationships between these concepts separately (Wang and VanderWeele 2011, Kus et al. 2014, Liu et al. 2020), studying these relationships in a single model may be beneficial for the research on the gender inequality and women's well-being.

In the current study, we aim to examine the relationships between women's perceptions of gender-based relative deprivation, their gender system justification and subjective well-being. Therefore, we expected a mediating role of gender system justification in the relationship between women's perception of relative deprivation and their subjective well-being levels (The tested model is included in Figure 1). Considering that women are in a more disadvantageous position in the society than men, we hypothesize that as women's perception of relative deprivation increases, their level of gender system justification, and accordingly, their subjective wellbeing would decrease. We expect that gender system justification has a mediating role in the relationship between women's perception of relative deprivation and subjective wellbeing.

## Method

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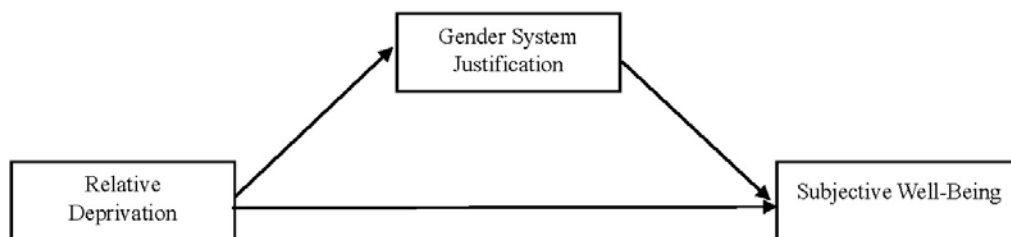
### Sample

The sample comprises of 328 volunteer Turkish-speaking female participants aged between 18 and 68 ( $M=31.64$ ,  $SD=11.50$ ), living in Türkiye. 2.4% of the participants were primary or secondary school graduates, 19.5% of them were high school graduates, 25.6% were undergraduate students, 35.7% completed undergraduate education and 13.1% completed postgraduate education. 3.7 of the participants did not report their educational level. Moreover, 5.2% of the participants had a socio-economic level below the average; 29% of them declared that their socio-economic levels were above the average, and 65% reported that they had a medium socio-economic level.

### Procedure

After approval was obtained from Mersin University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: 26.08.2020), the data was collected by a convenience sampling method with an online questionnaire via Google

Forms between January and June in 2021. This research aimed to reach adult female participants. Thus, female participants literate in Turkish, aged 18 and over were included in the study. We included all the participants who meet those criteria during the data collection dates.



**Figure 1. Tested model on the mediating role of gender system justification between relative deprivation and subjective well-being**

A survey form was prepared via Google Forms. At the beginning of this survey form, an Informed Consent Form was presented to the participants, including information about the purpose, duration and voluntariness principle of the research. After that, the questionnaires were presented on five screens one by one. Demographics Information Form, Relative Deprivation Scale, Gender System Justification Scale, The Satisfaction with Life Scale and Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) were presented respectively.

This survey form, consisting of 45 questions, was tested by the researchers before collecting the data for the study. Before the data collection, the researchers checked if there were any errors in the survey form which consists of 45 items. Participants were required to answer each question via Google Forms, and allowed to go back and change their answers. In order to ensure that each participant answered the survey only once, we used related Google Forms settings. The Google Forms link was send to the participants via university e-mail groups, verbal announcements and social media accounts. The purpose, duration and voluntariness principle of the study were also presented in those announcements. No reward or payment was given for participation. The participation took approximately 10 minutes. At the end of the data collection process, we informed the participants who wanted further information about the study.

## Measures

### *Demographics Information Form*

Demographics information form was prepared to obtain the information about participants' age, educational status, and socio-economic status.

### *Relative Deprivation Scale*

The Relative Deprivation Scale, developed by Kırıl (2009), consists of 9 items obtained from the Social Beliefs Scale (Kelly and Breinlinger 1995, Kırıl 2009) and the Gender Awareness Scale (Gurin 1985, as cited in Kırıl 2009). The scale, found to have a single factor structure by Kırıl (2009), was developed to measure the group-based relative deprivation perceived by women. Some of the items are "The majority of respectable jobs belong to men because our society discriminates against women", "Women as a group deserve a better place in society than they do now", "There is an inequality against women in terms of power and status in society compared to men". The items are 7-Point Likert Scale, ranging from "I totally disagree" to "I totally agree". While higher scores indicate a higher level of group-based relative deprivation, lower scores indicate lower relative deprivation. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was reported as .79 by Kırıl (2009). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was calculated as .85.

### *Gender System Justification Scale*

The scale was developed by Kay and Jost (2003) and translated into Turkish by Sezen (2019). There are 6 items on gender roles, male and female relations. Some of the items are "The division of labor in families is usually as it should be", "Generally, the relations between men and women are fair". This is a 7-Point Likert Scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Higher scores indicate higher level of gender system justification. A previous study reported that Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was .73 (Sezen 2019). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found as .74.

### ***Subjective Well-Being***

In order to measure the subjective well-being of the participants, life satisfaction and positive-negative affect, which are the components of subjective well-being, were considered. As Diener (1994) proposed, we calculate subjective well-being scores by combining the life satisfaction and positive affect scores, and subtracting negative affect scores from this score.

#### ***The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)***

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al. 1985), adapted into Turkish by Dağlı and Baysal (2016), was used to measure the participants' assessments of their life satisfaction. Some of the items are "I have a life close to my ideals" and "I am satisfied with my life". There are five items rated on a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Higher scores indicate higher life satisfaction. The internal consistency coefficient of this scale in the Turkish adaptation study was calculated as .88. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .87.

#### ***The Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)***

The Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson et al. 1988), adapted into Turkish by Gençöz (2000), was used to measure positive and negative affect as the components of subjective well-being in addition to life satisfaction. The scale consists of 20 items. While 10 items measure positive mood and 10 of measure negative affect. In the scale, positive emotional states include; "excited, strong, inspired, active, determined, attentive, interested, enthusiastic, proud and alert" while the negative emotional states consist of; "unhappy, guilty, nervous, hostile, frightened, embarrassed, angry, scared, distressed, uneasy".

Participants rate how much they have felt these emotions in the last two weeks on a five point Likert Scale. Higher scores from the positive affect subscale indicate higher positive emotions, while higher scores from the negative affect subscale indicate that higher negative emotions. The internal consistency of the scale was reported as .83 and .86 by Gençöz (2000). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .87 for the positive affect subscale and .84 for the negative affect subscale.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The current data were analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics 21. In this study, the relationships between the perception of relative deprivation, gender system justification, and subjective well-being variables (consisting of life satisfaction, positive emotion, and negative emotion components) were examined. Normality tests were conducted to determine if each variable showed a normal distribution. The mahalonobis distance was calculated to detect outliers and there were no extreme values in the data. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to determine if the data indicated a normal distribution. According to George and Mallery (2010), the values of skewness and kurtosis in the range of  $\pm 2$  indicates the normal distribution of data. All variables were reasonably normally distributed (maximum skewness= .552, maximum kurtosis = 1.47). Therefore, the data demonstrated a normal distribution. Since the study data was collected online, there was no missing data.

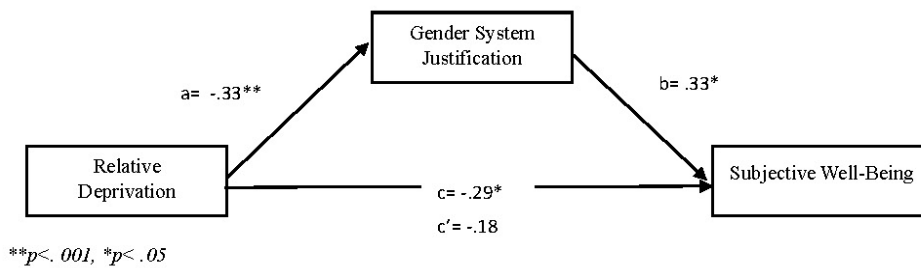
Pearson Correlations Coefficients was calculated to evaluate the correlations between variables. In order to examine the mediator role of the gender system justification in the relationship between the level of relative deprivation perceived by the women based on their gender and level of subjective well-being, SPSS Process 4.0 Macro was used (Hayes 2018). The mediating role of gender system justification between relative deprivation and subjective well-being was tested with "Model 4".

### **Results**

Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients between the variables are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, subjective well-being was positively correlated with gender system justification, while negatively correlated with relative deprivation.

### **Mediation Model**

Mediation model ( $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ ) comprises of relative deprivation as an independent variable (X), gender system justification as a mediator (M), and subjective well-being as a dependent variable (Y) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Mediation model of gender system justification in the relationship between level of relative deprivation and subjective well-being**

The Process Model 4 was conducted in mediation analysis in order to test the mediating effects of gender system justification in the relationship between relative deprivation and subjective well-being.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	31.64	11.65	-						
2. GSJ	16.21	7.04	.03	-					
3. RD	53.38	8.90	-.02	-.43**	-				
4. SWB	21.29	15.44	.20**	.19**	-.17**	-			
5. Life Satisfaction	14.79	4.66	.12*	.20**	-.12*	.66**	-		
6. Positive Emotions	31.13	8.29	.17**	.21**	-.11*	.78**	.36**	-	
7. Negative Emotions	24.62	7.90	-.12*	-.04	.15**	-.75**	-.33**	-.26**	-

\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05, N=328, GSJ: Gender System Justification, RD: Relative Deprivation, SWB: Subjective Well-Being

The results showed that relative deprivation significantly predicted gender system justification ( $B = -0.32$ ,  $t(322) = -8.191$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Gender system justification was found to have a significant positive effect on subjective well-being ( $B = 0.33$ ,  $t(321) = 2.516$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, direct effect of relative deprivation on subjective well-being was not significant ( $B = -0.18$ ,  $t(321) = -2.025$ ,  $p = .44$ ). The total effect of relative deprivation on subjective well-being was significant ( $B = -0.31$ ,  $t(321) = -3.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Obtained results from the indirect effect of relative deprivation ( $B = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ) on subjective well-being through gender system justification ( $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ ) indicated that the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval based on 5000 samples did not contain zero [lower limit (LL) CI: -0.1956, upper limit (UL) CI: -0.0209]. Therefore, the mediator role of gender system justification in the relationship between relative deprivation and subjective well-being was supported.

## Discussion

Women are exposed to inequality of opportunity and discrimination in almost every part of the world (e. g., Afrouz et al. 2023, Moreno-Bella et al. 2023). Similarly with the contexts of other disadvantaged groups (Magallares et al. 2016, Itzick et al. 2018), gender-based discrimination that women are exposed to affects their subjective well-being (Liang et al. 2010, Tost et al. 2020). We consider that some perceptions and beliefs may play a role in the impact of the gender discrimination on women's well-being. Therefore, in the present study, we investigated the mediator role of gender system justification in the relationship between women's perceived relative deprivation perceived and their subjective well-being.

Firstly, as expected, the results showed that relative deprivation negatively predicted women's gender system justification. In other words, the more women perceive that they are in a socially disadvantaged position compared to men, the less they tend to justify existing gender roles and inequality. Considering their societal position is disadvantageous relatively to men, women may be less likely to justify the gender system. The result supported the studies reporting a negative relationship between relative deprivation and system justification (Osborne and Sibley 2013, Kus et al. 2014). Increased awareness of the disadvantageous position may lead questioning the system norms. In the gender context, the women perceiving relative deprivation may question the fairness of their and men's social status and criticize the gender system. According to Jost and Banaji (1994), the tendency to justify the system is powerful but not inevitable. Although the members of a disadvantaged group tend to seek a justification for their position, the awareness of unfairness of inequality may make justification difficult for them. Parallely, research supports that the levels of gender injustice and inequality perceived by women negatively predicted system justification (Monteith and Hildebrand 2020, De Cristofaro et al. 2021).

The present study showed that relative deprivation negatively predicted women's subjective well-being. Perceiving that one's group is in a disadvantageous position and believing that there are differences in certain rights and resources between one's comparison group are closely related to one's well-being. Supporting this, studies conducted with various disadvantaged groups found that the perception of relative deprivation negatively predicts well-being (D'Abrasio and Frick 2007, Abrams et al. 2020). Consistent with the literature, our results showed that there was a significant negative relationship between the perception of relative deprivation and life satisfaction and positive affect, which are the components of subjective well-being. This finding may be better explained by the concepts of social identity and social comparison. According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and several studies supporting that (Cooper et al. 2017, Willis et al. 2019), individuals need to acquire a positive social identity to protect or increase their self-esteem. The acquisition of a relatively negative social identity may damage women's self-esteem and subjective well-being as a result of comparing their position to men's advantageous position. Thus, future research may consider the roles of women's social identification and self-esteem in the relationship between women's gender-related relative deprivation and subjective well-being.

The negative relationship between relative deprivation and subjective well-being may also be interpreted by perceptions of equality and justice. According to The Belief in a Just World (Lerner 1980), to feel safe, individuals need to believe that the world is a place where we get what we deserve. An injustice world threatens the well-being of individuals. Studies conducted in this context show that there is a positive relationship between individuals' beliefs in a just world and their subjective well-being (Kiral Ucar et al. 2019, Li et al. 2022). Thus, the women who see their gender's position in the society is lower than they deserve may be negatively affected by perceiving the world as an unjust place. Studies supported that subjective well-being levels can also be affected by the perceptions of justice (Kaya et al. 2022, Oh 2022). Future research may study the perception of justice in this context for a detailed understanding for the relationship between women's relative deprivation and subjective well-being.

Gender system justification was found to predict women's subjective well-being. The results indicated that women who have higher levels of gender system justification tend to have higher subjective well-being. There is no consensus in the literature on the relationship between system justification and subjective well-being. Some studies (Vargas-Salfate et al. 2018, Liu et al. 2019) support that system justification increases subjective well-being, while others (Rankin et al. 2009, Napier et al. 2010) rather suggest a negative relationship between the two variables. Our finding supports the view of system justification theory (Jost and Banaji 1994), which suggests that system justification is a soothing belief that helps individuals deal with uncertainty and threats, maintains their beliefs in a just world and consequently help them feel better. Some research support that the feelings of uncertainty and injustice are negatively related to well-being of individuals (Miner and Cortina 2016, Deniz 2021, Rehman et al. 2021). Thus, we may interpret that women's legitimization of existing gender roles and system contributes to well-being by helping to cope with feelings of uncertainty and injustice. In order to better understand the dynamics of the relationship between gender system justification and well-being, Future studies may consider the concepts of intolerance of uncertainty and belief in a just world in this relationship

Finally, the results of the mediation model supported that gender system justification has a mediator role in the relationship between gender related relative deprivation and well-being of women. Previous studies examining the relationship between these three variables together is quite limited. In one of those studies, the perception of relative deprivation and system justification were tested and showed as separate predictors of subjective well-being (Kus et al. 2014). In another study, the moderator role of system justification was suggested in the relationship between the perception of relative deprivation and subjective well-being (Osborne and Sibley 2013). In the current study, we supported that the relative deprivation levels of women predicted their subjective well-being through gender system justification. This finding is in line with the research examining the relationship between perceived discrimination, a variable and concept closely related to the concept of relative deprivation, and system justification and subjective well-being. For example, a study indicated that system justification mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and well-being of both women and the members of an ethnic minority group (Bahamondes et al. 2019). Similarly, Abrams and Grant (2012) found that relative deprivation affected the level of depression and in fact, social change beliefs mediated the effects of both collective relative deprivation and group identification on protest intentions. A comprehensive study was conducted by Napier et al. (2020), examining the relationships between discrimination perception, system justification, and well-being. Authors suggested that as women's level of rejection of gender discrimination increased, their level of well-being increased. They also added that the belief of a just system affects this relationship. According to Napier et al. (2020), denial of gender discrimination is one of the mechanisms for women to cope with gender inequality. Considering these and other findings, in the context of our study, the

effect of women's perception of relative deprivation on their well-being influenced by the buffering effect of the level of system justification. We also suggested that more research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms of the relationships between these three variables.

In the current study, the relationships between age and relative deprivation, system justification and subjective well-being were also investigated. Obtained results showed no significant difference between women's perceptions of relative deprivation and gender system justification levels across ages. However, a significant positive relationship was found between subjective well-being levels and age. We found that as women's ages increase, their positive affect and life satisfaction levels increase, while their negative affect levels decrease. Considering the literature, there are usually a negative relationship between the relative deprivation levels and age (Callan et al. 2015). There are also studies that find a significant positive relationship between age and system justification (Vargas-Salfate et al. 2018). In studies examining the relationships between age and subjective well-being, subjective well-being levels are found to differ significantly in different age ranges (Eryilmaz and Ercan 2011, Buecker et al. 2023). The relationships between age and subjective well-being may vary depending on culture, gender, socio-economic levels and personality characteristics (Lucas and Gohm, 2000). In the present study, the average age of the women was 31.64, and the participants were individuals who continued or completed their undergraduate education.

The current study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample of the research is only comprised of Turkish-speaking women. This may affect the generalizability of the sample in the current study. Therefore, it is recommended that future research should conduct more diverse samples from different cultures. The educational levels of participants may be another limitation of the research. Women who participated in the current research were mostly from undergraduate and graduate levels. Because people who have undergraduate and graduate-level education may have more opportunity to reach information about gender and acquire more awareness of gender issues, educational levels may affect their relative deprivation, gender system justification, and subjective well-being. Future studies should focus on people who have different educational levels, which may provide a better understanding on this issues. There are some variables (for example, the level of identification with female identity, belief in a just world, and intolerance to uncertainty) that are not covered in the current study but may contribute to the analysis of the relationships between these three variables. Conducting future studies by considering these shortcomings has some potential to contribute to research on this topic. Another limitation of the study may be that mediation analysis was conducted with data that was not collected longitudinally. This issue may limit the implications of the relationships found in this study because of the possible mutual interactions between variables. The collection of the data using self-report scales is another limitation of the study. Future studies may include some implicit measurements in order to overcome this limitation.

The current study provides considerable theoretical implications for the research on women's well-being, and future research may contribute to this topic in several ways. Firstly, we suggested that examining variables such as women's level of identification with their gender, social dominance orientations, and sexism levels will also contribute significantly to the literature on this issue. Secondly, the levels of relative deprivation may also be affected by identification with gender identity. In addition to this, the levels of protective and hostile sexist attitudes of women may potentially affect both the perception of relative deprivation and the levels of gender system justification. The current findings supported that women's subjective well-being level is closely related to gender roles and perceptions. Thus, we believe that the findings contribute to research examining the relationship between gender and well-being.

## **Conclusion**

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In the present study, the relationship between women's perceptions of gender-based relative deprivation and their subjective well-being, and the mediating role of gender system justification in this relationship were examined. Obtained results showed that as the perception of relative deprivation increases, the subjective well-being level of women decreases. While the perception of relative deprivation negatively predicts the gender system justification, gender system justification predicts subjective well-being positively. Gender system justification mediates the relationship between women's perception of gender-based relative deprivation and their subjective well-being. In other words, we suggest that women who perceive gender-based discrimination may question the existing gender system in society, and accordingly, their subjective well-being levels decrease. The results of the present study may contribute to the individual and social intervention programs that can be developed to promote women's well-being. Additionally, the results of the study may contribute to social and political discussions on gender equality and women's well-being.



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