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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parental Emotional Availability and Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Ayşenaz Ekin DUMAN[a] & Meliha TUZGÖL DOST[b]

[a]Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Nevşehir, Türkiye. [b]Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between the emotional availability of university students' parents and university students' well-being. The study group comprised 541 university students. Study data were collected using the Emotional Availability of Parents Scale, the PERMA Scale, the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, and a personal information form. We tested the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between the emotional availability of university students' parents and university students' well-being via structural equation modeling. The findings showed that difficulties in emotion regulation play a partial mediating role in the relationship between the mother's emotional availability and well-being. However, difficulties in emotion regulation do not play a role in the relationship between the father's emotional availability and well-being. While the father's emotional availability does not predict difficulties in emotion regulation at a statistically significant level, the mother's emotional availability statistically predicts difficulties in emotion regulation in the negative direction. Furthermore, the emotional availability of both parents statistically predicts university students' well-being in a positive way.

The university years can be considered as a transition period in life when individuals go through a number of academic, psychological, emotional, and social changes. During this period, students can have positive life experiences such as making life decisions independently (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020), acquiring new knowledge and skills, and expanding their social networks (Alsubaie et al., 2019), but they may also struggle with stressful experiences such as living away from family, adapting to a different environment, or coping with economic and academic difficulties (Gonzales et al., 2022). These stressful experiences make students' lives more difficult (Costello et al., 2022) and negatively affect their productivity, academic success, social relationships, and general health (Dessauvagie et al., 2022) and well-being (De Coninck et al., 2019). For these reasons, the university years constitute a risky period in life in terms of maladaptive coping, academic failure (Duffy et al., 2019), and mental health and well-being (Gonzales et al., 2022). It is emphasized in the literature

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR Ayşenaz Ekin DUMAN, aysenazduman@nevsehir.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-2682-0763, Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Nevşehir, Türkiye.

that mental health problems are quite common among university students (Westberg et al., 2022) and that students' well-being significantly decreases compared to the years before starting university (Worsley et al., 2022). This decline in students' well-being is a growing concern around the world (Chen & Lucock, 2022). Therefore, there is also growing interest in university students' mental health and well-being (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020).

Well-being is defined as a complex structure that encompasses psychological functionality and experience at the best possible level (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Wong (2011) described well-being as a structure that helps people feel good, stating that all human efforts are aimed at achieving well-being. According to Seligman (2011), who developed one of the most comprehensive well-being theories, well-being is composed of five main components: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Positive emotions reflect a pleasant life characterized by positive feelings, meaning entails having a sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself and acting accordingly, accomplishment is defined as competence and the capacity to fulfill responsibilities, positive relationships involve the presence of positive interactions established with important people in life, and engagement means devoting full concentration to given tasks (Butler & Kern, 2016). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001), well-being is closely related to mental health. Furthermore, well-being is needed for a functional life (Seligman, 2011). For that reason, it is possible to state that well-being has a critical role in people's lives. Recent studies (e.g., Dias-Lopes et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2021) have shown that university students often report a low level of well-being. In the Global Youth Well-Being Index report cooperatively prepared by the International Youth Foundation and Hilton (2017) to identify the well-being levels of young people aged 15-29, 72% of young Turkish people stated that their lives were stressful. Likewise, according to data from the Life Satisfaction Survey conducted in Turkey, among young people aged 18-24, 56.7% reported that they were happy/well in 2019, but this value decreased to 47.2% in 2020 and 44.5% in 2021 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020, 2021, 2022). Furthermore, according to data from that survey for the year 2021, the age group of 18-24 years had the lowest level of well-being. This survey clearly demonstrates that the rate of young adults reporting that they are happy/well has decreased in recent years in Turkey. In light of the related literature and statistics, it is possible to state that university students experience a critical period in terms of well-being. It is necessary to understand the factors that affect students' well-being in order to ensure, protect, and enhance it. Identifying the factors that affect well-being can also guide researchers and experts who want to help students achieve a better life (Punia & Malaviya, 2015). Moreover, it is also necessary to identify the factors that affect well-being in order to make the university years productive (Rand et al., 2020). In the current study, we address the emotional availability of parents and difficulties in emotion regulation as variables predicting students' well-being and we investigate the direct/indirect relationships among the related variables.

Parental Emotional Availability and Well-Being

Emotional availability is defined as a construct of relationships in which individuals express their feelings and respond to each other's emotional reactions (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). On the other hand, "parental emotional availability" was originally used to describe the presence of a supportive mother for a baby who is in the phase of exploring (Mahler et al., 1975). More generally, parental emotional availability reflects the emotional climate, quality, and qualification of a parent-child relationship (Biringen, 2000). Moreover, the emotional bond between a parent and child affects the child's happiness and well-being (Biringen & Easterbrooks, 2012; Kubicek et al., 2013). Parental emotional availability helps children adapt to their environments healthily and supports positive growth (Biringen, 2000; Ziv et al., 2018). A parent who is available emotionally is sensitive to all kinds of signals coming from the child and gives feedback to the child's positive and negative feelings, which is significant for the child's well-being (Biringen et al., 2014). Shaw et al. (2004) stated that emotional support given by a parent can have positive effects on psychological health in the following years. Similarly, Lum and Phares (2005) indicated that a high level of parental emotional availability leads to a decrease in emotional and behavioral disorders among young people. Oppenheim (2012) emphasized that a lack of parental emotional availability can be a risk factor for psychopathology. Studies conducted in recent years (e.g., Özbiler, 2020; Özdoğan, 2020) have revealed that as parental emotional availability increases, young people's level of well-being increases, as well. In light of the related literature

and previous findings, we considered parental emotional availability as a significant variable predicting well-being in the current study.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Well-Being

Emotions that are mostly harmonious can sometimes be destructive (John & Gross, 2004). Emotions may be destructive when they are experienced in the wrong type, intensity, or time, and it becomes necessary to regulate them in such cases (Gross, 2008). Emotion regulation is described as a process that entails regulating the intensity and frequency of emotions, and emotion regulation is claimed to contribute to one's well-being (Gross & Thompson, 2007). For that reason, being able to regulate emotions effectively when necessary is thought to be a basic determinant of mental health (Gross & Munoz, 1995). Being able to regulate emotions flexibly is also important in terms of adaptation and functionality in life (Helion et al., 2019). Gross (2002) stated that well-being is closely related to emotions and emphasized the importance of emotion regulation. Likewise, regulating emotions effectively is considered to be an important component of well-being in the literature as well as in clinical psychology practices (Nyklíček et al., 2011). On the other hand, difficulty in emotion regulation is defined as an inability to cope with emotional experiences or regulate emotions (Leahy et al., 2011). A review of the literature shows that many psychopathologies are associated with emotion regulation difficulties (Thompson & Goodman, 2010). Considering that one of the criteria of well-being is the absence of mental disorders, it is obvious that difficulties in emotion regulation can affect well-being in a negative way. Related studies (Gross & John, 2003; Saxena et al., 2011; Stevenson et al., 2019) have shown that students' levels of well-being decrease as they have more difficulties in emotion regulation. In light of the related literature and findings, we considered difficulties in emotion regulation as a significant variable affecting well-being.

Parental Emotional Availability and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Newborn babies need outside support in the regulation of their emotions (Kopp, 1989). This support is given by parents or other people who care for them in the early years of their lives. Positive interactions between parents and children contribute significantly to children's skills of emotion regulation (Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2000). For example, the parent or other person caring for a baby can help the baby regulate emotions by soothing long-lasting cries during stressful moments or by reinforcing the current situation during happy moments (Emde, 1998). For that reason, harmonious interactions with caretakers are crucial for babies to gain the skill of emotion regulation (Field, 1994). Babies who have emotionally available parents develop ways to express their feelings, emotion regulation strategies, skills of empathy, and self-perception over time (Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). In other words, a parent who is emotionally available helps the baby communicate and regulate emotions through recurring experiences (Emde, 1998). On the other hand, when parents are not available emotionally, when there are periods of long separation, or when parents are experiencing depression, difficulties in emotion regulation emerge for babies (Field, 1994). Hence, parental emotional availability is crucial in ensuring the acquisition of healthy emotion regulation skills (Biringen et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2015). Related studies in the literature (Gökçe & Yılmaz, 2018; Kelek, 2020) have shown that students have lower levels of difficulties in emotion regulation as parental emotional availability increases. In light of the related literature and findings, we considered parental emotional availability as a significant variable affecting difficulties in emotion regulation in the current study.

The Current Study

University students play critical roles in the development of cities, nations, and societies (Ratanasiripong et al., 2018). That is why university students' well-being is important not just for their individual success and potential (Arslan & Asıcı, 2022) but for societal development as a whole (Ratanasiripong et al., 2018). When considered from this point of view, students' well-being is a phenomenon that should be investigated at both individual and social levels. Related studies (e.g., Parker et al., 2023; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019) have shown that there is a positive relationship between university students' well-being and the emotional support they receive from their parents. In fact, in the Life Satisfaction Survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (2022), family members ranked first as a source of happiness for individuals. Kağıtçıbaşı (2017) further stated that

adult children's economic autonomy is accepted while emotional and psychological dependence on the family is maintained in countries like Turkey, where the dominating family model is described as a model of psychological/emotional interdependence. Considering Turkey's cultural features, it is possible to state that parental emotional availability is a significant factor for university students' well-being.

A review of the literature shows that there is a limited number of studies to date on the relationship between parental emotional availability and well-being (e.g., Özbiler, 2020; Özdoğan, 2020), and these studies have some important limitations. First, these studies have focused on the relationship between well-being and the emotional availability of only one parent, such as the emotional availability of fathers (Özbiler, 2020). Second, studies that investigated the relationship between well-being and parental emotional availability (Özbiler, 2020; Özdoğan, 2020) did not examine the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation. Therefore, the role of effective emotion regulation in increasing well-being has not been studied well in the literature. Considering the fact that parental emotional availability contributes to the development of emotion regulation skills (Easterbrooks & Biringen, 2000) and that emotion regulation has a crucial effect on well-being (Gross, 2002), we believe that addressing these three variables together is important for understanding the dynamics of the relationships among them. Moreover, while designing the current study, we assumed that emotional availability was more persistent and consistent than emotion regulation skills and that the skills of emotion regulation could be improved through various methods. In brief, the current study aims at investigating the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between university students' well-being and parental emotional availability to fill the aforementioned gap in the literature. Accordingly, the research hypotheses were as follows:

H1: The emotional availability of university students' parents predicts university students' well-being at a statistically significant level.

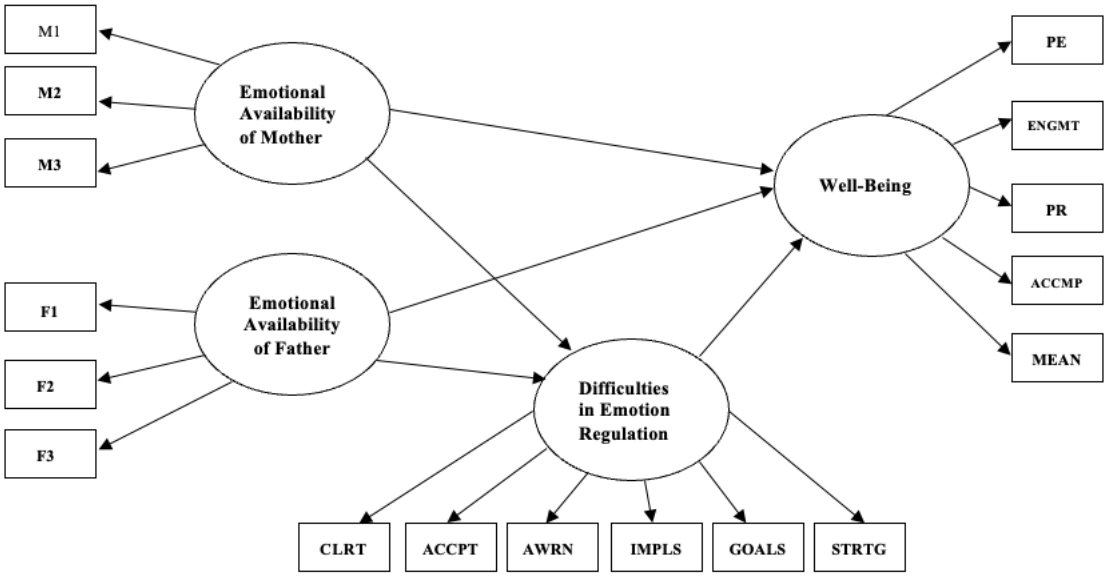
H2: The emotion regulation difficulties of university students predict university students' well-being at a statistically significant level.

H3: The emotional availability of university students' parents predicts university students' emotion regulation difficulties at a statistically significant level.

H4: Emotion regulation difficulties have a statistically significant mediating role between the emotional availability of university students' parents and university students' well-being.

Figure 1 provides the conceptual model reflecting the hypotheses of the study.

Figure 1. Hypothetical Model



Note. M1, M2, M3 = Parcels of Emotional Availability of Mother; F1, F2, F3 = Parcels of Emotional Availability of Father; PE = Positive Emotions; ENGMT = Engagement; PR = Positive Relationships; ACCMP = Accomplishment; MEAN = Meaning; CLRT = Clarity; ACCPT = Acceptance; AWRN = Awareness; IMPLS = Impulse; GOALS = Goals; STRTG = Strategies.

Method

Research Model

The current study aims to investigate the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between university students' well-being and the emotional availability of their parents. It is a correlational study employing a quantitative method. Correlational studies examine relationships among two or more variables without manipulating any of the variables (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In the current study, we examine both direct and indirect relationships among university students' well-being, their parents' emotional availability, and difficulties in emotion regulation.

Study Group

The study group comprised 541 university students attending different universities in Turkey in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. During the data collection process, we employed convenience sampling as we gathered the study data online in March and April, while there were precautions in place against the COVID-19 pandemic such as social distancing and partial quarantine. Convenience sampling is not a random sampling method. When it is difficult to employ random sampling methods, the convenience sampling method can be used to reach individuals who are conveniently accessible (Fraenkel et al., 2012). One of the inclusion criteria for enrollment in the current study was to have both parents alive. This criterion was necessary as one of the variables of the current study is parental emotional availability. Table 1 shows the demographic features of the study group.

Table 1. Demographic Features of the Study Group

Variables	Group	*n*	%
Gender	Female	446	82.4
	Male	95	17.6
Age	18	55	10.2
	19	97	17.9
	20	121	22.4
	21	110	20.3
	22	102	18.9
	23	25	4.6
	24+	31	5.8
Year of Study	English Prep School	8	1.5
	1st	198	36.6
	2nd	89	16.5
	3rd	133	24.6
	4th	101	18.7
	4th+	12	2.2
Total		541	100

Procedure

Before we began collecting the study data, we received permission from the Hacettepe University Ethics Commission (dated 16.02.2021 and numbered E-35853172-300-00001451762) as well as from the researchers who developed the data collection tools. After obtaining the necessary permissions, we transformed the data collection tools and forms to an online platform without making any other changes. The online forms also included a voluntary participation form that provided information about the study, and the participants ticked the consent button located at the end of the form before moving on to the scale items. The participants were required to tick all items in the scales to be able to proceed.

After creating the online forms, we shared the relevant link address via online platforms between the dates of March 15 and April 30, 2021. The online forms included the contact information of the researchers and the

participants were informed that they could contact the researchers when necessary. In addition, we paid special attention to the inclusion of detailed information on voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the protection of the study data as well as potential risks in the voluntary participation form. The data collection process lasted about two months (March and April of 2021) and we had reached 590 university students at the end of that time period.

Before starting to analyze the study data, we checked the data to see whether there were any missing or erroneous data. We found that 26 of the students did not meet the criterion of having both parents alive, and so we removed the responses of those students from the dataset. Furthermore, 23 of the remaining 564 students had given the same responses to all items in the mother and father forms of the Parental Emotional Availability Scale (Gökçe & Yılmaz, 2018). Therefore, we removed the responses of those 23 students from the dataset. We also checked the dataset for outliers and concluded that there were none. After these pre-analysis controls, we started the data analysis with the data gathered from 541 participants.

Data Collection

Measures

University Students' Personal Information

Personal Information Form. In the current study, we used a personal information form to gather information on demographic features such as the students' gender, age, university, year of study, and the parents being alive or not.

Well-Being

PERMA Scale. This scale, which was developed by Butler and Kern (2016) to identify individuals' levels of well-being, is composed of 23 items and 5 dimensions, which are positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, accomplishment, and meaning. The internal consistency coefficient of the original form of the scale varied between .92 and .95, while the internal consistency coefficient of each sub-dimension varied between .60 and .92. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Demirci et al. (2017) with a study group of university students, and they concluded that the Turkish form also had 23 items and 5 dimensions. The internal consistency coefficient of the whole scale was calculated to be .91 for the Turkish form, while the coefficients of the sub-dimensions varied between .61 and .81. At the end of the reliability analysis that we conducted in the current study, we concluded that the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .93 and the values for sub-dimensions varied between .70 and .86.

Parental Emotional Availability

Emotional Availability of Parents Scale. This scale was developed by Lum and Phares (2005) to identify the emotional availability of individuals' parents. The scale is composed of 15 items that ask participants to evaluate the mother and father separately, and it has only one dimension. At the end of the reliability analysis, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .92 for the mother's form and .93 for the father's form. On the other hand, the coefficients were respectively .96 and .97 for the mother and father based on data gathered from a non-clinical sample. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Gökçe and Yılmaz (2018), who also concluded that the scale was composed of 15 items and a single dimension. The internal consistency coefficient of the Turkish version was .95 for the mother's form and .97 for the father's form. At the end of the reliability analysis that we conducted in the current study, we concluded that the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .98 for the mother's form and .98 for father's form.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. This scale was developed by Gratz and Roemer (2004) to identify individuals' difficulties in emotion regulation. The scale is composed of 36 items within 6 dimensions, which are acceptance, goals, impulse, awareness, strategies, and clarity. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the whole scale was found to be .93 while the coefficients for the sub-scales varied between .80 and .89. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Rugancı and Gençöz (2010), who also concluded that the scale was composed of 6 dimensions and 36 items. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the whole Turkish form was found to be .94,

while the coefficients for the sub-scales varied between .75 and .90. The Turkish version of the scale was subsequently reviewed by Kavcıoğlu and Gençöz (2011), who made some minor changes in the translation of the scale items. In the current study, we used that revised final version of the scale. At the end of the reliability analysis we conducted in the current study, we concluded that the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was .95 for the whole scale while the coefficients for the sub-dimensions varied between .77 and .90.

Data Analysis

We first conducted preliminary analysis to test the structural equation model using the IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 and LISREL 8.80 package programs. We calculated skewness and kurtosis values for normality testing and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients for multicollinearity. After the preliminary analysis, we conducted structural equation model analysis in two steps. First we tested the measurement model for all the variables to be included in the model, and then we tested mediation through the structural model according to the measurement model and the hypotheses (Şimşek, 2007). As all scores were continuous, we employed the maximum likelihood method for estimation. We interpreted path/regression coefficients obtained from the structural equation model according to the critical value of ±1.96, which is the t value at the significance level of $\alpha = .05$. When the coefficients are higher than +1.96 or lower than -1.96, the path is accepted to be significant, while values not meeting those criteria are accepted to be insignificant (Çokluk et al., 2010).

We tested the observed variables in the structural equation model by using the sub-dimensions obtained from the scales rather than the items themselves. As the Parental Emotional Availability Scale is one-dimensional, we used the method of parceling for that scale (Şimşek, 2007). Accordingly, we obtained modified item correlations from the mother and father scales of parental emotional availability, and we listed those correlations and assigned three different parcels for each sub-dimension (e.g., M1, M2, and M3 parcels for the emotional availability of the mother). The method of parceling is often used for one-dimensional structures and it facilitates the fit between the model and data (Bandalos, 2002). The related literature includes many model-data fit indices that determine the fit of structural models. In the current study, we employed the most frequently used indices. Table 2 shows the acceptable values of model-data fit according to these fit indices.

Table 2. Model-Data Fit Indices and References

Index	Critical Value	References
χ^2/df	≤3, perfect model fit ≤5, good model fit	(Kline, 2005)
RMSEA, SRMR	≤.05, perfect model fit ≤.08, good model fit ≤.10, good model fit	(Anderson & Gerbing, 1984; Cole, 1987; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996; Steiger, 1990)
CFI	≥.95, perfect model fit ≥.90, good model fit	(Fan et al., 1999; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996)
GFI	≥.95, perfect model fit ≥.90, good model fit	(Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996)
NFI, IFI	≥.95, perfect model fit ≥.90, good model fit	(Hu & Bentler, 1999; Sümer, 2000)

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Before testing the model developed in the current study, we evaluated the assumptions of structural equation model analysis. We first addressed normal distribution and the problem of multicollinearity. We calculated the skewness and kurtosis values for normality testing. The coefficient of skewness was found to vary between -0.866 and 0.998, while the coefficient of kurtosis varied between -1.138 and 0.659. According to George and Mallery (2010), values of skewness and kurtosis between -2 and +2 signify the normal distribution of the scores. Therefore, the data obtained in the current study reflected normal distribution, meeting the related assumption of the structural equation model (see Table 3). We then evaluated the problem of multicollinearity based on the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. According to Çokluk et al. (2010), a correlation value equal to or higher than .90 signifies the problem of multicollinearity. The results of the correlation analysis conducted in the current study showed that there was no problem of multicollinearity among the variables in the model (see Table 4).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Dimensions of Scales

Scales	Dimensions	Lowest	Highest	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Availability of Mother	M1	5	30	22.62	6.87	-0.86	-0.19
	M2	5	30	22.24	6.67	-0.72	-0.41
	M3	5	30	22.30	7.03	-0.74	-0.44
Emotional Availability of Father	F1	5	30	20.18	7.43	-0.45	-0.90
	F2	5	30	18.09	7.66	-0.18	-1.14
	F3	5	30	19.13	7.54	-0.30	-1.06
Well-Being	Positive Emotions	0	10	6.18	1.82	-0.72	0.57
	Engagement	0.33	10	6.78	1.76	-0.67	0.41
	Positive Relationships	0	10	6.40	2.02	-0.64	0.22
	Meaning	0	10	6.38	1.99	-0.87	0.62
	Accomplishment	0.33	10	6.70	1.61	-0.71	0.66
Difficulties in Emotion Regulation	Clarity	5	25	13.04	4.19	0.46	-0.31
	Awareness	6	28	14.96	4.14	0.19	-0.22
	Impulse	6	30	14.66	5.67	0.63	-0.38
	Accept	6	30	12.69	5.63	0.99	0.48
	Goals	5	25	16.75	4.85	-0.13	-0.98
	Strategy	8	40	20.62	7.57	0.54	-0.41

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), measurement models need to be validated in order to provide structural equation models. For this reason, we conducted the analysis of our structural model in two steps. First we tested the measurement model for all variables included in it and then we tested the mediation according to the measurement model and hypotheses (Şimşek, 2007).

Table 4. Results of Correlation Analysis Among the Dependent and Independent Variables

	M1	M2	M3	F1	F2	F3	Positive Emotion	Engagement	Positive Relationships	Meaning	Accomplishment	Clarity	Awareness	Impulse	Accept	Goals	Strategy
M1	1																
M2	.95**	1															
M3	.93**	.95**	1														
F1	.63**	.62**	.62**	1													
F2	.61**	.62**	.65**	.91**	1												
F3	.63**	.63**	.65**	.94**	.94**	1											
Positive Emotion	.31**	.32**	.31**	.32**	.31**	.30**	1										
Engagement	.25**	.29**	.28**	.29**	.29**	.27**	.73**	1									
Positive Relationships	.47**	.46**	.47**	.43**	.42**	.41**	.66**	.62**	1								
Meaning	.31**	.33**	.29**	.26**	.26**	.24**	.69**	.71**	.61**	1							
Accomplishment	.23**	.25**	.24**	.22**	.24**	.21**	.58**	.68**	.53**	.81**	1						
Clarity	-.15**	-.12**	-.10*	-.12**	-.12**	-.11**	-.32**	-.29**	-.37**	-.35**	-.36**	1					
Awareness	-.14**	-.13**	-.13**	-.13**	-.09*	-.10*	-.32**	-.29**	-.39**	-.35**	-.35**	.50**	1				
Impulse	-.23**	-.19**	-.18**	-.18**	-.14**	-.14**	-.41**	-.34**	-.39**	-.33**	-.28**	.47**	.31**	1			
Accept	-.15**	-.13**	-.14**	-.08*	-0.05	-0.07	-.31**	-.22**	-.30**	-.26**	-.24**	.41**	.34**	.63**	1		
Goals	-.12**	-.11**	-.09*	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-.29**	-.26**	-.23**	-.30**	-.28**	.30**	.10*	.61**	.39**	1	
Strategy	-.22**	-.19**	-.19**	-.17**	-.15**	-.14**	-.55**	-.44**	-.43**	-.44**	-.36**	.40**	.22**	.77**	.61**	.64**	1

Note. **p < .01, *p <.05.

Step 1: Testing the Measurement Model

In the first step, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement model and tested the model-data fit. Table 5 shows the model-data fit values obtained from confirmatory factor analysis.

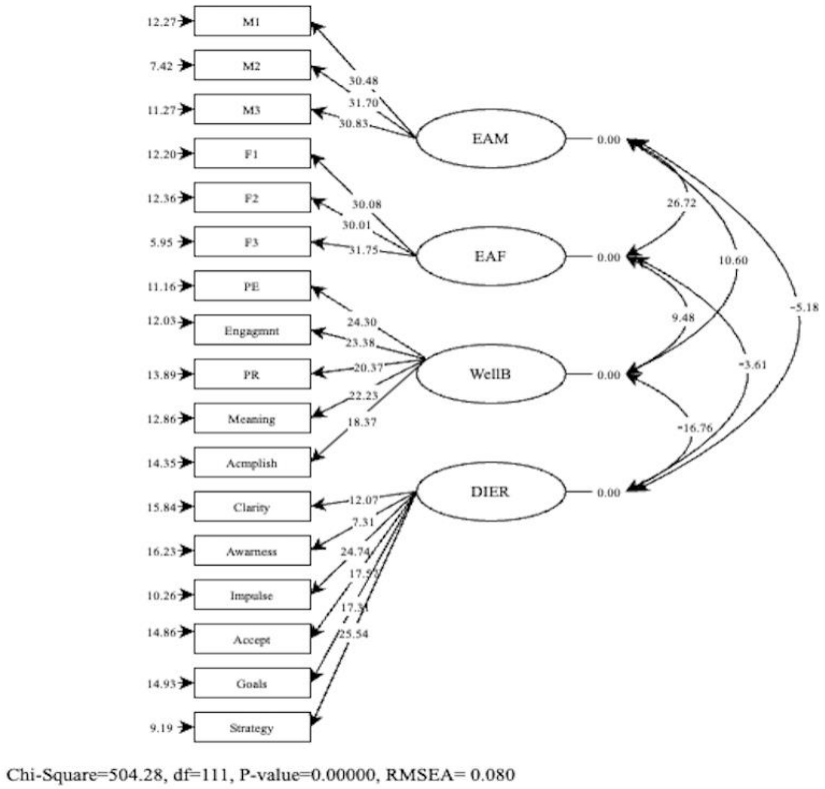
Table 5. Data Fit Values Regarding the Measurement Model

Fit Indices	Value
χ^2/df	4.54
RMSEA	.08
CFI	.97
NFI	.96
IFI	.97
SRMR	.06
GFI	.90

As seen in Table 5, we first calculated the chi-square/df (χ2/df) value and we concluded that this value was (504.28/11) = 4.54, which reflects a good fit. We also found that another important fit value, RMSEA, was .080, which again reflected a good fit. The other considered data fit values were model-data fit values for the general measurement model, and these values confirmed a good fit (CFI = .97, NFI = .96, IFI = .97, SRMR = .06, GFI = .90). Therefore, it was concluded that the model-data fit of the measurement model was appropriate for structural equation analysis.

After examining the model-data fit values, we tested the measurement model to determine the extent to which the observed variables explained the latent variables as well as investigating the relationships between latent variables. Figure 2 presents the related model.

Figure 2. Measurement Model Regarding the Mediating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation in the Relationship Between University Students' Parents' Emotional Availability and University Students' Well-Being



Note. EAM = Emotional Availability of Mother; EAF = Emotional Availability of Father; WellB = Well-Being; DIER = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation; M1, M2, M3 = Parcels of Emotional Availability of Mother; F1, F2, F3 = Parcels of Emotional Availability of Father; PE = Positive Emotions; Engagmnt = Engagement; PR = Positive Relationships; Acmplish = Accomplishment; Accept = Acceptance.

Figure 2 shows the t values between the observed variables and latent variables in the model. The regression coefficients between all dimensions and latent variables were statistically significant. All t values were higher than +1.96, which is the critical value at the significance level of .05 (Şimşek, 2007). Therefore, construct validity was confirmed according to the results of confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement model. Table 6 shows the results of correlation analysis performed between latent variables.

Table 6. Results of Correlation Analysis Among Latent Variables

	Emotional Availability of Mother	Emotional Availability of Father	Difficulties in Emotion Regulation	Well-Being
Emotional Availability of Mother	1			
Emotional Availability of Father	.66**	1		
Difficulties in Emotion Regulation	-.23**	-.16	1	
Well-Being	.41**	.38**	-.57**	1

Note. $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$.

As seen in Table 6, the relationships among latent variables were statistically significant ($p < .05$). The relationship between the emotional availability of the mother and that of the father was the relationship of highest significance, which is to be expected. This finding is likely due to the fact that both of those variables are measured with the same scale. There was a medium-level statistically significant relationship in the positive direction between parental emotional availability and well-being. While difficulties in emotion regulation were negatively related to well-being at a statistically significant medium level, the emotional availability of the mother was negatively related to difficulties in emotion regulation at a statistically significant low level ($p < .05$). There was no statistically significant relationship between the emotional availability of the father and difficulties in emotion regulation ($p > .05$). Therefore, although the measurement model displayed a good fit, the latent variable of difficulties in emotion regulation, which was the mediating variable in the current study, was not related to the emotional availability of the father, which means that the assumption necessary for the mediation model was not satisfied. For that reason, we did not include the path between these two latent variables in the analysis. After testing the measurement model, we moved on to the second step and developed the structural equation model.

Step 2: Testing the Structural Model

In the second step, we checked whether data fit for the structural model was achieved or not. Table 7 shows the data fit values for the structural model.

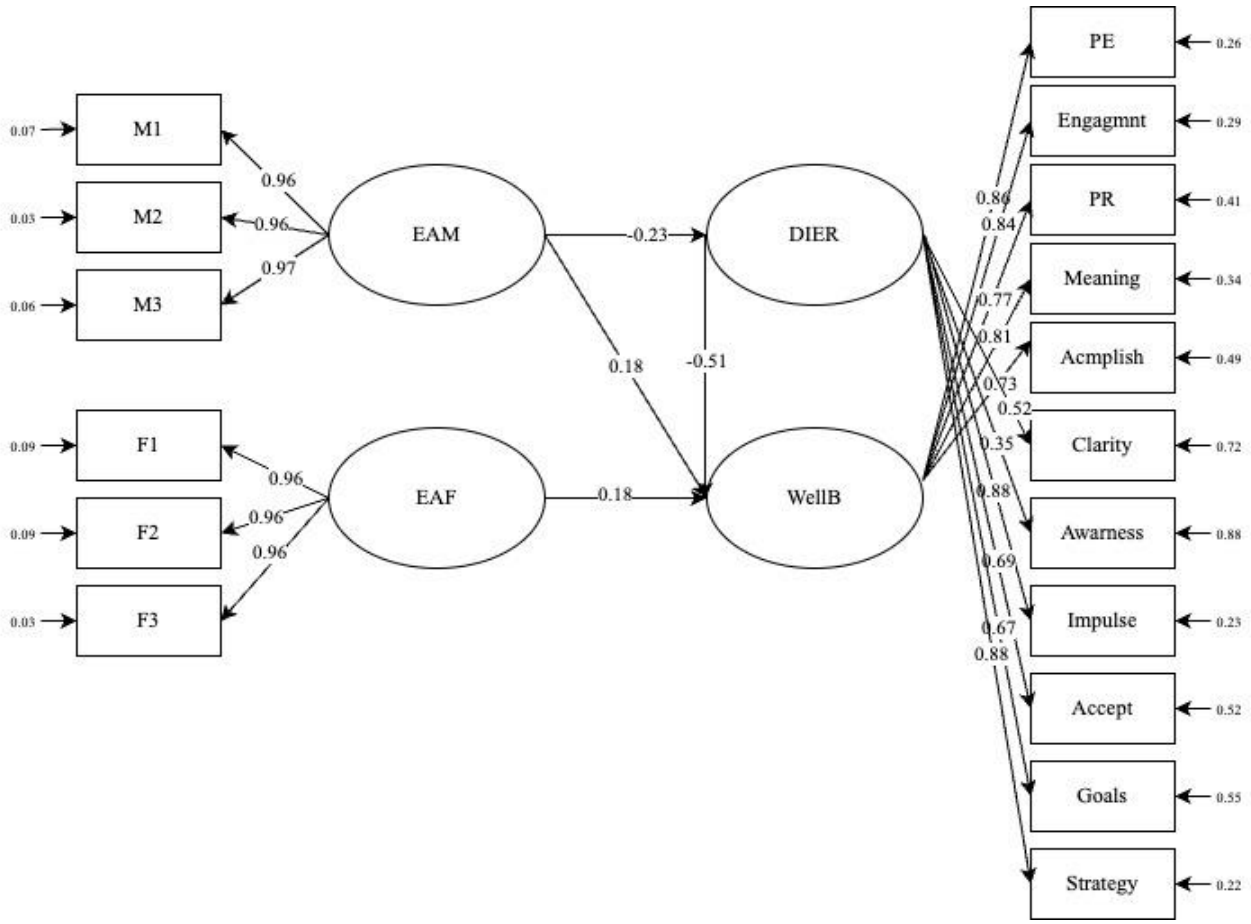
Table 7. Data Fit Values Regarding the Structural Model

Fit Indices	Value
χ^2/df	4.66
RMSEA	.078
CFI	.95
NFI	.96
IFI	.96
SRMR	.067
GFI	.88

As seen in Table 7, the chi-square/df value (χ2/df) was found to be (526.63/113) = 4.66, which means there was a good fit. We also found that another significant fit value, RMSEA, was .078, which signifies a good fit. The other considered data fit values were model-data fit values for the general measurement model, and these values confirmed a good fit (CFI = .96, NFI = .96, IFI = .96, SRMR = .067, GFI = .88). Therefore, it was concluded that the model-data fit of the measurement model was appropriate for structural equation analysis.

After examining the data fit for the structural model, we developed the structural model in terms of the standardized path coefficients. Figure 3 shows the related model.

Figure 3. Structural Model Regarding Standardized Path Coefficients



As seen in Figure 3, the impact of the latent variable of the mother's emotional availability on the variable of difficulties in emotion regulation was -0.23, while its impact on the variable of well-being was 0.18. The impact of the latent variable of difficulties in emotion regulation on the latent variable of well-being was -0.51. Finally, the impact of the latent variable of the father's emotional availability on the latent variable of well-being was 0.18.

The coefficient of 0.41 obtained between the independent variable of the measurement model (emotional availability of the mother) and the dependent variable (well-being) also reflected the regression coefficient of the latent variable of the mother's emotional availability on the latent variable of well-being. In the structural model, when the latent variable of difficulties in emotion regulation, which was simultaneously the mediating variable, was added to the model, the regression coefficient between the two variables was found to be 0.18. Therefore, the power of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables declined but did not lose its significance when the mediating variable was added to the model. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), if the relationship between the dependent and independent variables disappears after the mediating variable is added to the model, complete mediation is indicated, while if the relationship between the dependent and independent variables weakens but does not lose its significance, partial mediation is indicated. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that difficulties in emotion regulation have a partial mediating role in the effect of the mother's emotional availability on well-being.

Discussion

Association Between Parental Emotional Availability and Well-Being

In this study, we concluded that the emotional availability of the parents of university students predicts the students' well-being at a statistically significant level in the positive direction. Our findings are consistent with those of some other studies in the literature (e.g., Özbiler, 2020; Özdoğan, 2020). Özdoğan (2020) concluded that university students' subjective and psychological well-being increased when their parents' emotional availability increased. Özbiler (2020), on the other hand, addressed only the father's emotional availability and concluded that university students' subjective well-being increased when the father's emotional availability increased. In some other studies (e.g., Gökçe & Yılmaz, 2018; Rea-Sandin et al., 2020), it was found that as the parents' emotional availability increased, psychological symptoms decreased. There are also studies in the literature (e.g., Ferrari et al., 2015; Galambos et al., 2006; Mendoza et al., 2019) demonstrating that university students who are happy with their relationships with their parents have higher levels of well-being. Parental emotional availability determines the degree to which the child and parents are happy with their shared emotional relationship (Biringen & Easterbrooks, 2012). Thus, parental emotional availability can be considered a criterion for a healthy child-parent relationship. In other words, students who are happy with their relationships with their parents are more likely to have parents who are emotionally available. This idea is reinforced by findings that parental emotional availability determines the quality and health of the child-parent relationship (Biringen, 2000; Emde & Easterbrooks, 1985). Furthermore, parental emotional availability reflects the quality of the relationship between a parent and child (Biringen, 2000), and it affects one's well-being in a positive way (Kubicek et al., 2013). For that reason, it is possible to state that this finding of the current study is an expected one, and positive parent-child relationships including emotional availability affect well-being positively. Additionally, due to Turkey's cultural features, both autonomy and family dependence are maintained as children enter young adulthood (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017). Therefore, close family relationships continue into the university years in Turkey, which is an important factor that contributes to individuals' well-being.

Association Between Difficulties in Emotion Regulation and Well-Being

Another finding of the current study is that difficulties in emotion regulation predict university students' levels of well-being in the negative direction at a statistically significant level. This is further confirmed by the findings of previous studies in the literature (Gross & John, 2003; Saxena et al., 2011; Stevenson et al., 2019). According to those studies, as difficulties in emotion regulation decrease, there is an increase in university students' subjective (Saxena et al., 2011) and psychological well-being (Stevenson et al., 2019); similarly, as functional emotion regulation skills increase, well-being increases as well (Gross & John, 2003). It is known that the emotions that help individuals hold on to life might sometimes be detrimental (Greenberg, 2017), and effective emotion regulation is closely related to well-being (Nyklíček et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be said that this finding of the current study is both to be expected and consistent with the literature. Some previous studies have also focused on the relationship between psychological problems and difficulties in emotion regulation as well as the relationship between difficulties in emotion regulation and well-being (e.g., Ince, 2020; Pektaş, 2015). According to those studies, as university students experience more difficulties in emotion regulation, they also experience more psychological symptoms (Ince, 2020) and depression (Pektaş, 2015). Since difficulty in emotion regulation is one of the diagnostic criteria for many psychological problems (Thompson & Goodman, 2010), the results of the current study are again consistent with the literature in this regard. Difficulties in emotion regulation negatively affect individuals' well-being and lead to psychological problems. In light of all these findings, it is clear that emotion regulation skills are important and necessary for well-being and psychological health. In fact, it seems that emotion regulation inevitably affects the well-being of individuals as they begin communicating with their caregivers through their emotions immediately after birth. For that reason, the ability to regulate emotions effectively positively affects individuals' psychological health, level of happiness, and well-being regardless of their developmental stage.

Association Between Parental Emotional Availability and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

The current study has shown that the emotional availability of the mother predicts university students' difficulties in emotion regulation in the negative direction at a statistically significant level. However, the emotional availability of the father does not predict difficulties in emotion regulation at a statistically significant level. Previous studies conducted with young adults (e.g., Gökçe & Yılmaz, 2018; Kelek, 2020) showed that as parental emotional availability increased, the participants' levels of difficulties in emotion regulation decreased. On the other hand, Yüksel (2020) concluded that the emotional availability of only the father was negatively related to difficulties in emotion regulation. Thus, there are divergent findings in the literature. The findings of the current study are not surprising as mothers take care of babies after birth and in the following periods of early childhood in a majority of cases (Lum & Phares, 2005). Mahler et al. (1975) introduced the concept of emotional availability and they put particular emphasis on the mother's emotional and supportive presence while defining it. According to some other related studies (e.g., Clay et al., 2017; Lum & Phares, 2005), the emotional availability of the mother has a stronger effect on teenagers' functionality compared to the emotional availability of the father. Thus, the current study reinforces the findings of related studies in the literature both directly and indirectly. In this context, the mothers being the caretakers of babies (Lum & Phares, 2005) might have affected their emotional availability positively. Moreover, mothers continue to be the ones who provide the most care for children in the subsequent years of childhood, and that might have affected university students' preferences for their mothers to share their emotions. Mothers may be more influential on students' difficulties in emotion regulation for these reasons.

As mentioned above, mothers have a major role in children's developmental processes. On the other hand, it is emphasized that fathers also have important roles in children's psychological health and development (Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004), and that assumption is supported by studies on emotional availability (e.g., Volling et al., 2002; White & Renk, 2012). The current study has also revealed that when fathers are more available emotionally, students' levels of well-being increase (see Table 6). However, in the current study, there was no statistically significant relationship between the emotional availability of the father and difficulties in emotion regulation (see Table 6). Gender stereotypes about men may explain the differences in findings about the relationships among parental emotional availability, well-being, and emotion regulation. In Turkish culture, men are expected to suppress and hide their emotions and to be strong and successful in line with social messages such as "men don't cry" (Çelik, 2016). In such cases, it might be difficult for men to reflect on their emotions and talk to their children about emotional issues. Individuals who do not share their own feelings and do not recognize the emotional reactions given by children cannot contribute to children's emotion regulation skills. In this context, men often overlook their emotions, goals, and self in order to meet the requirements of "being a man" imposed on them by Turkish society (Çelik, 2016). In other words, men tend to keep their emotions to themselves in order to be accepted by society. This can negatively affect their emotional relationships with their children. At the same time, as a result of these gender stereotypes about men, students might not have considered the lack of an emotional relationship with their fathers to be a problem, and they might not have been negatively affected even if their fathers were not available emotionally.

The findings of the current study regarding mothers and fathers might have been shaped in part by the measurement tool that was used. We used the Emotional Availability of Parents Scale, which was adapted to Turkish by Gökçe and Yılmaz (2018). This measurement tool might have reflected some cultural differences as the behaviors indicating a father's emotional availability might differ in Turkish society and culture. Furthermore, parental emotional availability might be affected by gender roles depending on the child's developmental stage. For instance, fathers' financial support of their children in the university years might be interpreted as a form of emotional availability. For this reason, developing culture-specific measurement tools addressing emotional availability could provide more accurate information about the relationship between the emotional availability of the father and emotion regulation.

Mediating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Finally, we investigated the main research problem of the current study and concluded that difficulties in emotion regulation had a partial mediating role in the relationship between the emotional availability of the mother and students' well-being. We also found that difficulties in emotion regulation did not have a mediating role in the relationship between the emotional availability of the father and students' well-being. We could not

identify any other study in the literature focusing simultaneously on parental emotional availability, well-being, and difficulties in emotion regulation. However, Gökçe and Yılmaz (2018) investigated the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between general psychological health and parental emotional availability, and they found that difficulties in emotion regulation had a partial mediating role. According to some other studies, difficulties in emotion regulation have a mediating role in the relationship between university students' perception of parental acceptance-refusal and their psychological symptoms (e.g., Ince, 2020), and in the relationship between continuous anxiety and depression (e.g., Pektaş, 2015). Thus, difficulties in emotion regulation have a determinant role in parents' effects on psychological health. In contrast to previous studies, however, the current study found that difficulties in emotion regulation did not have a mediating role in the relationship between the emotional availability of the father and well-being. In other words, studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between the emotional availability of the father and well-being, but difficulties in emotion regulation are not a determinant of that relationship. In this regard, the findings of the current study might be the result of social gender roles or stereotypes and cultural features.

Future Research

While designing the model of the current study, we conducted a literature review and did not find any studies focusing on the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation in the relationship between university students' well-being and parental emotional availability. Therefore, similar studies could be conducted with university students in Turkey and other countries. Moreover, the variables of the current study could be addressed in different developmental periods to compare similarities and differences between those developmental stages. Future studies could also include variables that might mediate the relationship between well-being and parental emotional availability, such as emotional self-efficacy or perceived emotional abuse. In the current study, we concluded that difficulties in emotion regulation did not mediate the relationship between the emotional availability of the father and well-being. This might be a result of social gender roles or stereotypes as well as some cultural features. In order to confirm the effect of culture, the mediating role in question could be studied with two separate models by grouping students according to their attitudes about social gender roles, such as those with egalitarian attitudes regarding social gender roles and those who consider men superior to women. Moreover, studies of cultural comparisons could be conducted to reveal the differences more clearly.

Some suggestions for experts working in the field as well as parents can be suggested in light of the findings of the current study. As difficulties in emotion regulation mediate the relationship between the emotional availability of the mother and well-being, experts could conduct group studies to improve students' skills of emotion regulation. Furthermore, as there is a positive relationship between the emotional availability of both parents and well-being, seminars could be held on what emotional availability is and what it encompasses. As it might be difficult to reach university students' parents, studies or seminars could be conducted via online platforms. In the current study, we concluded that the emotional availability of the father did not predict difficulties in emotion regulation at a significant level. Experts in the field could carry out various studies in order to improve the emotional availability of fathers. Furthermore, they could focus on fathers' emotional availability together with factors that can affect their emotional availability and social gender roles/stereotypes imposed on men/fathers. Parents could benefit from such research by participating in studies or programs that will improve their emotional availability.

Limitations

In addition to its strengths, the current study has some limitations. First, the study variables were limited to the features evaluated by the measurement tools selected for the study. Second, only undergraduate students aged 18-24 years who were receiving education at universities located in different provinces of Turkey in the 2020-2021 academic year participated in the current study. For this reason, the study results can only be generalized to groups that have personal or cultural features similar to those of the current study group. Considering that some students might not have an internet connection and students might take scales and questionnaires more

seriously when they are responding with pencil and paper, the fact that the study data were collected via an online platform in March-April 2021, when partial quarantine measures against COVID-19 were in place, can be described as another limitation. We reached university students via the convenience sampling method. Thus, the current study has the limitations of that sampling method. Furthermore, the numbers of male and female participants were not close to each other, which can be considered as another limitation. Finally, this study employed a correlational model, and the lack of causal relationships among the variables may be another limitation. Future studies could investigate the relationships among relevant variables by employing causal comparisons or longitudinal designs.

Author Note: This study was presented as a presentation at the 24th International Psychological Counseling and Guidance Congress held on 17-18-19 November 2023. Moreover, this study was obtained from the master's thesis completed in 2022.

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