



Examination of the Relationships between Happiness, Self-Compassion, and Personality Traits in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this research is to explore the relationships between happiness, self-compassion, and personality traits in young adults. A correlational model was used for this study, which involved a sample of 400 volunteer participants. The data were collected using the Personal Information Form, the Adjective-Based Personality Scale, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, and the Self-Compassion Scale. SPSS software was employed to analyze the descriptive statistics, correlation values, and predictive values. The results indicated significant relationships between happiness, personality traits, and self-compassion. Specifically, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and self-compassion showed positive correlations with happiness, whereas neuroticism showed a negative correlation. Additionally, extraversion and neuroticism, key dimensions of the five-factor model of personality, along with self-compassion, were found to be significant predictors of happiness scores. The findings suggest that promoting traits like extraversion and self-compassion may be effective strategies for enhancing happiness in young adults. The study is limited to young adults, which may affect generalizability. Future research could include different age groups and use varied research methods to gain broader insights. Suggestions for future research were also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Personality refers to the consistent patterns of behavior that influence how individuals think, feel, and act (Burger, 2016). According to Gerrig and Zimbardo (2014), personality is a complex set of psychological traits that shape an individual's distinctive patterns of behavior across different situations and over time. Personality traits are stable and ingrained tendencies to respond in specific ways, encompassing individuals' consistent patterns of behavior, emotion, and thought (Chidester et al., 1991; Parks-Leduc et al., 2015).

Various studies have been conducted by numerous researchers to identify and define the fundamental dimensions of personality (Allport & Odbert, 1936; Cattell, 1943; Eysenck, 1983). These studies have provided evidence for five dimensions of personality based on diverse personality data. These five dimensions are referred to as the "Big Five" because they consistently emerge across studies employing various methods (Burger, 2016). Each of the five factors encompasses a specific set of characteristics and has been observed across many different cultures. This supports the notion that the five factors represent fundamental aspects of human nature and are universal (Costa & McCrae, 1992a; Costa & McCrae, 1992b). The Big Five consists of extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and agreeableness (Costa & McCrae, 1986).

Extraversion refers to an individual's level of engagement with their environment. It is characterized by traits such as sincerity, sociability, assertiveness, activity, thrill-seeking, and positive emotions. Extraverted individuals approach life with energy, enthusiasm, joy, and confidence. They experience pleasure from social interactions and exhibit confidence in their engagements. They are not inclined to avoid being the center of attention. In contrast, introverts often exhibit a lack of the energy, enthusiasm, and confidence. They tend to be more reserved and socially distant, and may experience reluctance to actively engage with their environment (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Watson et al., 1994). The conscientiousness dimension, on the other hand, reflects the degree of control and discipline an individual possesses (Burger, 2016). Individuals with high levels of conscientiousness are typically more organized, goal-oriented, punctual, reliable, diligent, and careful, while those with lower levels of conscientiousness are generally perceived as careless, irresponsible, reluctant to work purposefully, and disorganized (Bruck & Allen, 2003; Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2014). Costa et al. (1991) noted that high levels of conscientiousness encompass both activating and inhibiting aspects. The activating aspect is manifested in achievement drive and commitment to work, whereas the inhibiting aspect is reflected in meticulousness and precaution. Another personality dimension is openness to experience. Openness to experience refers to the tendency to engage in intellectual activities and seek out new experiences. Individuals high in openness are typically characterized by an interest in and curiosity about intellectual issues, a vivid imagination, a preference for novelty, and the ability to generate innovative ideas and concepts. In contrast, individuals low in openness are generally characterized by a preference for familiarity over novelty and a resistance to change (Chamorro-Premuzic & Ahmetoglu, 2012; Williamson, 2018). Neuroticism, defined as a tendency toward emotional instability (Bacanli et al., 2009), is the fourth personality dimension. It refers to the predisposition to experience negative emotions such as guilt, fear, irritability, and sadness (Basim et al., 2009). Individuals with high levels of neuroticism are more prone to emotional instability and are more likely to experience emotions such as anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, and shame. These individuals often struggle with impulse control and coping with stress. In contrast, individuals with low levels of neuroticism tend to exhibit more emotionally balanced, calm, and composed behaviors. They are generally more effective at coping with stressful situations (Bruck & Allen, 2003). The final dimension of the Big Five is agreeableness, which relates to interpersonal relationships (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). According to Costa et al. (1991), agreeableness influences self-image and plays a role in shaping social attitudes and life philosophy. Agreeableness encompasses characteristics such as trust, honesty, altruism, harmony, modesty, and mildness. Individuals with high levels of agreeableness are generally affectionate, friendly, warm, and tolerant. In contrast, individuals

with low levels of agreeableness are often characterized as self-centered, competitive, irritable, and suspicious (Bruck & Allen, 2003; Chamorro-Premuzic & Ahmetoglu, 2012).

Personality traits are important factors influencing individuals' preferences, interests, decisions, and behaviors (Golbeck & Norris, 2013; Nunes & Hu, 2012). In this context, it is believed that personality traits may also affect individuals' levels of happiness. A review of the literature reveals studies indicating significant relationships between personality traits and happiness levels (Juang et al., 2021; Koydemir et al., 2014; Milić et al., 2019; Pishva et al., 2011; Ziapour et al., 2018).

Happiness is a concept that has attracted attention and contemplation from past to present (Tov & Diener, 2009; Yıldırım & Arslan, 2021). The desire to be happy is a universal aspiration, present in individuals of all ages, cultures, experiences, and genders (Nelson & Lyubomirsky, 2014). People strive to shape their lives in ways that bring them happiness (Veenhoven, 1994). Goals such as health, beauty, wealth, and power acquire significance because individuals believe they contribute to their happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Veenhoven (2000) proposed that happiness can be examined both objectively and subjectively. Objectively happiness is defined as living in favorable conditions, such as economic prosperity, peace, and freedom. Subjectively happiness is defined as the extent to which an individual positively evaluates their life as a whole and enjoys the life they lead.

In general, the concept of happiness is analyzed in two dimensions: hedonic and eudaimonic (Keçeci, 2020). Hedonic happiness refers to the pleasure an individual experiences, while eudaimonic happiness involves the alignment of the individual with their authentic self (Watkins, 2015). In the hedonic happiness, the focus is on living a life that maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain (Bergsma, 2008). According to this perspective, the happiness derived from overall life satisfaction constitutes the quality of life (Veenhoven, 2003). On the other hand, eudaimonic happiness is defined as the happiness an individual achieves when they realize their full potential (Watkins, 2015). The ultimate life goal, in this context, is recognized as living a virtuous life (Vella-Brodrick, 2016).

In the study conducted by Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), it was revealed that the happiness levels of individuals consist of three basic factors: genetics, living conditions, and activities aimed at promoting happiness. Additionally, the researchers found that genetics account for 50% of happiness, living conditions for 10%, and activities aimed at increasing happiness for 40%. In this context, it can be argued that happiness can be influenced by individual behaviors (Veenhoven, 1994).

Happiness is a positive psychological state characterized by high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect (Carr, 2016). Upon reviewing the literature, studies examining concepts within the scope of positive psychology, such as forgiveness (Adam-Karduz & Sarıçam, 2018; García-Vázquez et al., 2020), perceived social support (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2022; To et al., 2022), and hope (Satıcı et al., 2023; Witvliet et al., 2019), which are associated with happiness levels, are particularly notable. Another concept associated with happiness is self-compassion (Wollast et al., 2019).

The concept of self-compassion is closely linked to the broader definition of compassion (Neff, 2003a). Compassion refers to selfless behaviors aimed at helping others (Wispe, 1991). When individuals express compassion toward others, they may develop a sense of empathy for them. In such instances, compassion involves a non-judgmental, open-minded response to others' mistakes, rather than harsh criticism or judgment (Neff et al., 2005). Compassion can also be directed toward oneself, especially when an individual experiences pain or sadness as a result of life events beyond their control (Neff, 2011b). This self-directed form of compassion is referred to as self-compassion.

Self-compassion, which has its roots in Buddhist philosophy (Neff, 2004), can be defined as an individual's ability to recognize and accept their own pain through the use of metacognitive strategies, while remaining open to it and demonstrating self-tolerance (Neff, 2003a; Neff, 2003b). Self-compassion involves the cultivation of new positive emotions by embracing negative emotions, rather than attempting

to replace them with positive ones (Neff, 2011a). Individuals with high self-compassion are more likely to feel relaxed, happy, optimistic, and satisfied, experience lower levels of anxiety and depression when faced with negative life events, and exhibit greater self-tolerance (Allen & Leary, 2010; Neff, 2011a).

Neff (2022) examined the concept of self-compassion through three sub-dimensions: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. These three dimensions interact and influence each other (Neff, 2003b). Self-kindness can be defined as the opposite of self-judgment. It refers to being tolerant and understanding toward oneself, rather than engaging in harsh self-criticism or judgment when confronted with a painful situation or failure. The second dimension is common humanity. When individuals experience a negative life event, they often believe they are the only ones experiencing such a situation and feel ashamed of being responsible for the event. Common humanity allows individuals to recognize that such experiences are shared by all people, thus alleviating feelings of loneliness and isolation. Mindfulness is the ability to hold and accept one's painful thoughts and feelings with balanced awareness, rather than over-identifying with them (Germer, 2009; Neff, 2003a). In other words, it refers to the individual's ability to observe what is happening in the present moment and face the facts by accepting them without judgment (Neff, 2022).

Positive psychology, which encompasses concepts such as happiness and self-compassion, is increasingly gaining prominence in the literature (Wang et al., 2023). With the growing interest in positive psychology, research on happiness and self-compassion has also increased. However, upon reviewing the literature, no study has been identified that concurrently examines happiness, self-compassion, and personality traits. Furthermore, it is believed that examining whether personality traits and levels of self-compassion influence happiness would be significant both theoretically and for practical applications. This study is expected to contribute to the literature and provide insight for future research. In this context, the aim of the study is to explore the relationship between personality traits, happiness, and self-compassion levels. To achieve this goal, the following key research questions were investigated:

1. Is there a significant difference in the happiness levels of young adults based on gender?
2. Is there a significant relationship between personality traits, self-compassion, and happiness levels among young adults?
3. Do personality traits and self-compassion levels significantly predict the happiness levels of young adults?

METHOD

Research Design

This study aims to explore the relationship between personality traits, happiness, and self-compassion levels. To achieve this, a relational model was employed. The relational model is a type of research in which the relationships between two or more variables are examined without any intervention in these variables (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020).

Study Group

Descriptive statistics for the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

Variable	N	%	Mean	SD
Total	400	100		
Female	310	77.5		
Male	90	22.5		
Age (years)			24.07	3.85

The study group consisted of 400 participants, including 310 females (77.5%) and 90 males (22.5%), aged between 18 and 35 years. The mean age of the participants was 24.07 years, with a standard deviation of 3.85.

Research Instruments

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire - Short Form

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire - Short Form, developed by Hills and Argyle (2002), is an 8-item scale designed to assess levels of happiness. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Doğan and Akıncı-Çötök (2011). Initially, the scale was translated from its original form into Turkish, and linguistic equivalence was evaluated using the back-translation method. Subsequently, item analysis was conducted to determine whether the scale items adequately represented the construct. As a result of this analysis, the item-total correlation of the 4th item was found to be below .30 (.17), leading to its removal from the scale. In the adaptation study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as $\alpha = .74$. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses indicated that, similar to the original version, the Turkish scale retained a single-factor structure. The adapted scale is a self-report instrument consisting of 7 items (e.g. "I am quite satisfied with everything in my life."), with responses scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I completely disagree) to 5 (I completely agree). The scale includes two reverse-coded items (e.g. "I do not have happy memories related to my past."). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = .70$.

Self-Compassion Scale

Self-Compassion Scale, developed by Neff (2003b) to assess individuals' levels of self-compassion, was adapted into Turkish by Deniz et al. (2008). The original scale consists of 26 items distributed across six sub-dimensions. Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). During the adaptation process, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses revealed that the Turkish version of the scale exhibited a single-factor structure. Furthermore, two items with item-total correlations below .30 were removed. The adapted scale is a self-report instrument comprising 24 items (e.g., "I try to be understanding and patient toward the aspects of my personality that I dislike."). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was reported as $\alpha = .89$, and the test-retest reliability was .83. Possible total scores range from 24 to 120, with 11 items reverse-coded (e.g., "When I feel bad, I tend to dwell on everything that is negative."). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be $\alpha = .92$.

Adjective-Based Personality Test

Adjective-Based Personality Test was developed by Bacanlı et al. (2009) based on the five-factor personality theory to determine individuals' personality traits. The scale features a two-tailed design, utilizing adjective pairs corresponding to the factors in the five-factor model (e.g. Optimistic-Pessimistic, Unmotivated-Motivated, Selfish-Altruistic). It consists of 40 items that measure the dimensions of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, in line with the five-factor personality theory. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the relevant sub-dimensions are $\alpha = .73$, $\alpha = .89$, $\alpha = .80$, $\alpha = .87$, and $\alpha = .88$, respectively. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be $\alpha = .68$, $\alpha = .88$, $\alpha = .77$, $\alpha = .81$, and $\alpha = .81$, respectively.

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form was developed by the researchers to collect gender and age data.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data of the study were collected online via Google Forms, with 415 participants responding to the survey. However, since the study focused on young adults, the responses of 15 individuals who were outside

the 18-35 age range were excluded from the dataset, and the analysis proceeded with the remaining data. The dataset did not contain any missing data. Prior to analysis, the normality of the data distribution was assessed. For this purpose, the skewness and kurtosis values of the scores obtained from the scales were analyzed. A skewness and kurtosis range between -1.5 and +1.5 indicates that the data follows a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients for each scale and sub-dimension fall within the -1.5 to +1.5 range. Based on these results, parametric tests were deemed appropriate for the data.

Table 2. *Skewness and kurtosis values*

Scale	Sub-dimension	Skewness	Kurtosis
Personality traits	Extraversion	-.360 (SH=.122)	-.180(SE=.243)
	Agreeableness	-.644(SH=.122)	.459(SE=.243)
	Conscientiousness	-.705(SH=.122)	.669(SE=.243)
	Openness to Experience	-.709(SH=.122)	.812(SE=.243)
	Neuroticism	.193(SH=.122)	.084(SE=.243)
Self-compassion		-.304(SH=.122)	.247(SE=.243)
Happiness		-.423(SH=.122)	.393(SE=.243)

Data were analyzed using the SPSS program with independent samples t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and multiple linear regression analysis.

Ethic

The ethics approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, on 20.02.2024, with the approval number 04-2024/82.

FINDINGS

This section includes t-tests for gender, correlations examining the relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis.

Table 3. *T-test results for gender*

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	SS	sd	t	p
Happiness	Female	310	23.36	4.77	398	1.39	.16
	Male	90	22.57	4.74			

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

The data presented in the Table 3 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean happiness scores between male and female young adults.

Table 4. *Correlation coefficients for variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Happiness	1						
2.Self-compassion	.61**	1					
3.Extraversion	.44**	.34**	1				
4.Agreeableness	.30**	.26**	.36**	1			
5.Conscientiousness	.30**	.21**	.51**	.42**	1		
6.Openness to Experience	.33**	.32**	.67**	.48**	.51**	1	
7.Neuroticism	-.42**	-.51**	-.18**	-.24**	-.15**	-.12*	1

Table 4 shows a significant positive correlation between happiness scores and self-compassion scores ($r = .61$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of self-compassion are strongly associated with greater happiness. Furthermore, positive correlations were found between happiness scores and several subdimensions of personality traits, namely extraversion ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), agreeableness ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), conscientiousness ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), openness to experience ($r = .33$, $p < .01$), and neuroticism ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$).

= .30, $p < .01$), and openness to experience ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that individuals who score higher on these traits tend to report higher levels of happiness. Conversely, a significant negative correlation was observed between happiness and neuroticism ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$), implying that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism tend to experience lower happiness. Overall, these results highlight the complex and multifaceted relationships between personality dimensions, self-compassion, and happiness.

Table 5. Results of multiple regression analysis for predicting the level of happiness

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	Bivariate R	Partial R
Constant	10,739	1,633		6.57	.000		
Self-compassion	.132	.013	.452	9.95	.000	.614	.448
Extraversion	.125	.019	.260	6.58	.000	.440	.314
Neuroticism	-.104	.032	-.144	-3.31	.001	-.427	-.164
R= 0.673		R ² = 0.453					
F(3,396)=109.50		p< .05					
Happiness=10.739+0.132.(Self-compassion) +0.125.(Extraversion) -0.104.(Neuroticism)							

Since the subdimensions of personality traits, namely agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, were not found to be significant predictors in the initially constructed regression model, the analysis was repeated with a revised model excluding these variables. The results of this revised analysis are presented in Table 5. Upon examining Table 5, it is observed that the newly constructed regression model is statistically significant, indicating a meaningful relationship between the included predictors and happiness levels. Self-compassion, together with the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism, accounts for approximately 45% ($R^2 = .45$) of the variance in happiness among the participants. This highlights the considerable explanatory power of these variables in predicting happiness.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study is to reveal the predictive relationships between personality traits, self-compassion, and happiness levels in young adults. Upon examining the obtained findings, it was observed that there was no significant difference in happiness levels based on the gender variable. Zweig (2015) analyzed the results of a survey conducted by the Gallup World Poll and explored the relationship between happiness and gender in 73 countries. As a result of this analysis, it was concluded that either women were happier than men or there was no significant difference between the two genders. When examining relational studies in the literature, research conducted by Cihangir-Çankaya and Meydan (2018), Ekinci and Hamarta (2020), and Kim et al. (2020) found no significant gender differences in happiness levels. However, studies conducted by Salavera & Usan (2021) and Yang et al. (2024) found significant results in favor of women.

Another result of the study is the presence of a significant relationship between young adults' personality traits, self-compassion, and happiness levels. A significant positive relationship was found between happiness and self-compassion, as well as between happiness and the subdimensions of personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. A significant negative relationship was observed with neuroticism. Similar findings have been observed in previous studies, where positive relationships were found between happiness and extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, whereas a negative relationship was found with neuroticism (Aziz et al., 2014; Doğan, 2013; Lauriola & Iani, 2015). The extraversion dimension is characterized by being active, energetic, enthusiastic, and talkative; the agreeableness dimension by being grateful, forgiving, generous, and kind; the conscientiousness dimension by being reliable, careful, planned, and effective; the openness to experience dimension by being artistic, imaginative, curious, and original; and the neuroticism dimension by being anxious, tense, self-pitying, and worried (McCrae & John, 1992). In this context, it can be stated that the positive personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience are positively associated with happiness, whereas neuroticism, characterized by negative tendencies, is negatively

associated. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which similarly highlights positive associations between positive personality traits and happiness, and a negative association with neuroticism.

When the research findings are examined, it is observed that personality traits and self-compassion levels significantly predict happiness levels. It can be stated that the self-compassion levels and the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism explain about 45% of the happiness levels of young adults. Ford et al. (2016) stated that personality traits play a determining role in an individual's happiness. In the current study, it was found that the dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism among personality traits predict individuals' happiness levels. Doğan (2013) indicated that the personality traits most strongly predicting happiness are neuroticism and extraversion. Neuroticism is associated with negative affect, whereas extraversion is linked to positive affect (Carr, 2016). A study by Yoon et al. (2013) found strong relationships between neuroticism and the likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms. Neuroticism is seen as a source of anxiety and depression (Pelechano et al., 2013). Individuals with high levels of neuroticism are more prone to experiencing emotions such as worry, fear, sadness, anger, shame, and irritability (Basim et al., 2009; Bruck & Allen, 2003). The more frequent occurrence of such negative emotions can be considered a significant negative predictor of happiness levels. Extraversion, on the other hand, is a personality trait characterized by being lively, excited, talkative, cheerful, and social (Somer et al., 2002). Extraversion is associated with enjoying social interaction and experiencing positive social emotions (Pelechano et al., 2013). Individuals with high extraversion tend to experience deeper and more fulfilling interpersonal relationships (Doğan, 2013). In a study by Tan et al. (2018), it was found that the personality trait of extraversion positively affects happiness levels through social support and hope. Based on these findings, it can be stated that extraversion positively predicts levels of happiness, and this result aligns with previous research.

Self-compassion can be defined as an individual's ability to be open to their own suffering and show tolerance towards themselves (Neff, 2003a). Upon examining the existing research, studies have shown that, similar to the results of this study, self-compassion positively predicts happiness levels (Inam et al., 2021; Pastore et al., 2023; Tingaz et al., 2022; Topkaya et al., 2022; Tunca, 2022). Individuals with high levels of self-compassion are aware of their problems, shortcomings, and weaknesses but instead of adopting a critical and harsh attitude towards themselves, they display a kinder and more compassionate approach. In this way, self-compassion helps in the development of positive emotions in the face of negative life events (Leary et al., 2008). Studies have shown positive relationships between self-compassion and positive emotions (Çarkıt & Yalçın, 2021; Deniz et al., 2012; Neff, 2011a). Furthermore, there are studies that demonstrate negative relationships between self-compassion and depression (Kurtses-Gürsoy & Akkoyun, 2023; Lou et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). In this context, it can be stated that the finding that self-compassion significantly and positively predicts happiness levels is consistent with the existing literature and similar studies.

In conclusion, the findings of this study reveal the impact of personality traits and self-compassion on happiness levels. However, the research has some limitations. The study was conducted with young adult participants, and conducting further studies with different age groups would enhance the generalizability of the results and contribute to the literature. Additionally, the study employed a relational model, which is one of the quantitative research methods. To gain alternative perspectives and benefit from other methods, future research could use qualitative and mixed research designs. Given the limitations of the cross-sectional design in this study, future research might consider using longitudinal approaches to better investigate the interactions among variables over time. Furthermore, understanding the relationships among happiness, self-compassion, and personality traits is expected to contribute to future research. Identifying key psychological factors related to happiness, which is considered a fundamental purpose of life (Veenhoven, 1994), is important for both researchers and practitioners. The results of this study may be useful in developing psychoeducational programs aimed at enhancing happiness. Furthermore, these findings could inform workshops designed to improve students' happiness in units such as university guidance centers.

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