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## Young Women’s Transition to the Workforce: The Influence of Career-Decidedness on Happiness and the Mediating Role of Self-Esteem



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### Abstract

The employment of women in developing nations is a significant concern for policymakers, and while several studies address strategies for improving women’s workforce involvement, research on the influence of career decidedness on the happiness of young women remains limited. This study aims to determine the mediating role of general self-esteem in the effect of career decisiveness on the overall subjective happiness levels of young women aged 19 to 26. Data collected from 320 young women currently pursuing higher education in the Marmara Region of Turkey through the purposive sampling method and via surveys were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM). Confirmatory factor analysis and SEM were conducted using SPSS AMOS. The results indicate that as the levels of career decidedness among young women increase, their overall happiness levels also increase, and general self-esteem positively supports this relationship. In other words, the subjective happiness levels of young women tend to increase as they become more confident and decisive about their career paths. Based on the results, recommendations for policymakers, organisations, and individuals are provided to increase the levels of career decidedness, general self-esteem, and overall happiness levels of young women. In addition, this study offers new insights for future research regarding the subjective happiness levels of young women from a career perspective.


### Keywords

Career Decidedness, General Self-Esteem, Happiness, Young Women, Employment



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## Introduction

Women's participation in the workforce is a significant issue around the world (Stocker & Byrne, 2012). This significance stems from women's ability to create value in various manufacturing and service processes. According to reports from organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, women's worldwide labour force participation rates are lower than those of males. Women are more likely to work in precarious, part-time jobs (Fine, 2012). The International Labour Organisation (2022) reported that in 2022, the global women's labour force participation rate would be 47%, while the male workforce participation rate would be 72%. A similar pattern could be seen in Turkey. Despite the annual increase in women's employment, the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) reports indicate that women's employment is about 30% (TÜİK, 2023). Although women's work participation rates are lower than men's, their employment is essential for both global economic progress. These challenges highlight the importance of supporting women in sustaining their careers. In addition, women's contribution to the labour market is critical in terms of productivity and employment, as well as individual well-being and social welfare. Women's participation in employment is important not only because it enriches the labour force skill pool but also because it enhances individual economic independence, positively influencing self-worth (Azar & Vasudeva, 2006). Moreover, women's involvement in the workforce could contribute to an increase in household income, making it a significant issue for both individuals and society as a whole (Gerçek, 2024). Hence, inequalities in women's labour force participation are often thought to be related to gender norms and values (Klasen et al., 2019) and conducting career studies in the context of women across different cultures is significant for understanding this phenomenon.

Career decidedness, grounded in *the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)* (Lent et al., 1994), is related to individuals making clear career-related decisions. Research on career decidedness has typically examined job-seeking behaviour and other career outcomes at the high school and university levels (Neice & Bradley, 1979; Solberg et al., 1995). In countries similar to Turkey, where traditional gender roles are more prevalent, examining

women's career decidedness is particularly important (Akçakanat & Uzunbacak, 2019; Çöp, 2020). In such cultures, women's primary responsibilities are often perceived as domestic, and there is an increasing number of studies shedding light on the shifts in these paradigms (Bayat & Baykal, 2021; Lietzmann & Frodermann, 2021). Therefore, cultural factors influence career decisions.

Studies on career decidedness have been primarily associated with increased career opportunities, increased job satisfaction (Hirschi, 2011), decreased intention to drop out of school (Bargmann et al., 2021), and increased life satisfaction (Lounsberry et al., 1999). Moreover, research has demonstrated that career decisions influence individuals' subjective well-being (Uthayakumar et al., 2010). Therefore, individuals' career decisions are a significant factor that might impact a broad concept such as subjective well-being, with happiness being one of the deepest human concepts that people have questioned for centuries. Subjective happiness is defined as a general state of contentment (Diener, 1984). Since a career encompasses all job-related experiences and the increasing significance of work in modern society, it is considered a key factor influencing happiness. Hence, career-decidedness could have positive effects on happiness. Early career studies show that the most distinct categorizations in this research are high school and university students and working adults, and factors influencing individual career decisiveness include personality types, locus of control, and self-esteem (Gordon, 1998). In the study by Koçak et al. (2021) with university students in Turkey, it was found that career decidedness positively affects happiness.

This study is based on SCCT and Super's *Life-Span, Life-Space Theory* (Super, 1980). The Life-Span, Life-Space Theory posits that career development occurs in different stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, midlife, and late adulthood, with distinct career behaviours exhibited at each stage. Life-space emphasizes that individuals hold different roles in various areas of their lives; for instance, a person could be a student, a mother, and an employee simultaneously. Super (1980) highlighted that self-concept could significantly influence career decisions and can change over time, thereby affecting those decisions. Within the context of the Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, and SSCT, this

study hypothesised that individuals could develop a better self-concept through their career decisions, which can, in turn, enhance their levels of happiness. Self-concept is a crucial component of SCCT because individuals' thoughts about themselves have the potential to influence career outcomes (Lent & Brown, 2019). General self-esteem refers to individuals' overall self-worth and self-value (Choi et al., 2007). Since individuals with higher levels of general self-esteem tend to have more positive evaluations of their self-worth, their levels of happiness are also higher (Moza et al., 2019). In this context, this study examines the mediating role of general self-esteem in the effect of career decidedness on happiness among young women in Turkey. The distinguishing feature of this study compared to prior research lies in its examination of the relatively underexplored impact of career decidedness on happiness through a model that incorporates general self-esteem as a mediating variable, specifically focusing on young women. In this way, the study seeks to contribute to the body of literature on career development while also offering insights into this area from women's viewpoint. The findings from this study are expected to provide guidance for policymakers, public institutions, universities, recruiters, and human resources professionals in private companies, as well as researchers working in the fields of career development, human resources, and well-being.

## Theoretical Background

### Career-decidedness and subjective happiness

Career decisions have a significant impact on individuals' lives (Hirschi, 2011). A career, encompassing all job-related experiences, holds various economic, psychological, and sociological meanings (Bluestein, 2013). It can directly and indirectly influence an individual's social status, reference group, and purchasing power (Arthur et al., 1989; Hall, 2002). Since a career is directly related to individual income, it is a key determinant of a person's standard of living and, consequently, their life satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 2009). Career decidedness is a significant variable that is considered when making career decisions. According to Gordon (1998), one's degree of career decisiveness could be defined as their

degree of assurance about a certain decision concerning their career. Moreover, career decidedness is more than just the antonym of being career-indecisive. Career decidedness pertains to the degree of certainty or determination people have on their desired employment routes that they choose to follow after completing their education (Restubog et al., 2010). In addition, career decidedness is related to complex decision-making processes. In this context, the terms “decided” and “undecided” are often used (Gordon, 1998). In other words, career decidedness is the degree of certainty an individual has in their career path, whereas undecidedness signifies the opposite, indicating uncertainty about their career path.

The notion of career decidedness is primarily based on Lent et al. 's (1994) SCCT approach. According to this widely examined theory in career research, cognitive, motivational, and external environmental factors influence individuals' career self-management behaviours. Career decision-making has been extensively studied across a wide spectrum, including high school students, university students, and working adults. According to prior research, the determinants of career decidedness include personality types and values (Lounsbury et al., 1999). While early studies (e.g., Neice & Bradley, 1979; Lounsbury et al., 1999) indicated that career decidedness does not differ by gender, it is important to note that these studies were primarily conducted in the United States of America (USA) or European countries, thus not reflecting other cultural contexts. Despite this, age is considered a significant variable affecting career decision-making. As individuals age, their career-related thoughts mature, potentially increasing their career decidedness. Later studies have also shown that personality traits such as extraversion play a more regulatory role in career indecision (Di Fabio et al., 2015). In addition, studies involving working adults have determined that occupational self-efficacy positively influences career decidedness (Hirschi & Valero, 2017). In research conducted by Yu et al. (2021) with university students in China, it was found that a proactive personality positively impacts career decidedness.

Gender is an important focal point in career studies (Huffman & Torres, 2001). Research on career indecision has shown that gender is a significant determinant. Developmental differences between men and women, participation rates in education, and job search

strategies are considered to be influential factors in this regard (Feldman, 2003). Some studies have shown that gender does not significantly influence career decision-making (Di Fabio et al., 2015). However, despite findings indicating that gender does not play a role in the career decision-making process, there is evidence that women generally exhibit more indecision compared to men (Rassin & Muris, 2005). In a study by Boo and Kim (2020) involving university students in the USA, it was found that female students faced career-related issues and exhibited career indecision. Similarly, a study conducted on the career decisiveness levels of university students in Turkey found that the career decisiveness of female students was moderate (Mutlu Yaşar & Sunay, 2020). Nevertheless, findings related to women's career decisions in collectivist cultures appear to be limited.

Studies on career decidedness are mostly related to career self-management and career decisions and have also been examined in connection with job search and employability (Uzunbacak, 2024). Among the outcomes of career decidedness are factors such as the ability to seize career opportunities, job satisfaction (Hirschi, 2011), protean career orientation (Li et al., 2019), and intention to drop out (Bargmann et al., 2021). Lounsberry et al. (1999) found that career decision-making positively affected the life satisfaction of undergraduate students. However, it has been determined that individuals with prolonged high career indecision tend to have lower levels of core self-evaluations, which negatively affect life satisfaction (Jaensch et al., 2015). Life satisfaction is the comprehensive evaluation of an individual's experience of life and is considered a component of subjective well-being. The prevailing consensus is that an increase in life satisfaction has a positive impact on overall subjective well-being. Uthayakumar et al. (2010) claimed that career decisions impact individuals' subjective well-being based on their belief that completing life tasks is an essential driver of well-being and that choosing career objectives is a fundamental life activity for young adults.

Subjective happiness is a subcomponent of the umbrella concept known as subjective well-being. It is acknowledged that in addition to factors such as demographic characteristics, health status, and social activities, individuals' levels of happiness are an integral part of their overall subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Subjective well-being is related to

individuals' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their lives, and often, subjective well-being and happiness are interchangeable terms (Diener et al., 2003). Moreover, happiness and life satisfaction are used interchangeably in some studies, indicating the perceived harmony between overall expectations and achievements in life (Brockmann et al., 2017), which is influenced by career behaviours (Hirschi, 2014). The impact of career on life satisfaction and happiness is a unique field of study within the context of women, influenced by various factors such as challenges in work-life balance, self-actualisation, and role overload (Chen, 2018; Peronne, 2000; Rottenberg, 2014). Women's happiness is an important research area for sociologists, psychologists, and researchers in other disciplines. While studies on the impact of career attitudes on happiness exist (e.g., Karavdic & Baumann, 2014; Pan & Zhou, 2013), research on happiness and happiness has predominantly focused on working women (Gerçek, 2024; Okulicz-Kozaryn & da Rocha Valente, 2018). In contrast, studies on young women at the career entry stage remain limited.

The well-being approach posits that individuals' overall satisfaction is influenced by social, cognitive, behavioural, and personal elements (Lent et al., 2009), within the employment domain significantly impacting life satisfaction (Koçak et al., 2021). SCCT proposes that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to perform career-related tasks more effectively than others, which, in turn, fosters positive beliefs and emotions, ultimately enhancing life satisfaction (Lent et al., 2005). In this context, individuals with high career decidedness may feel more confident in overcoming potential career barriers, leading to lower stress levels related to career and job search. In addition, from the perspective of life-span life-space theory, making a career decision at the career entry stage, when young individuals step into the labour market, is an existential matter related to finding meaning in life and managing anxiety (Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014). An individual with high career decidedness is more likely to find meaning in life and experience lower levels of anxiety, which may contribute to greater overall happiness. Drawing on life-span, life-space theory, and SCCT, it is expected that young women's subjective happiness would be influenced by their career decision-making levels, increasing their positive perceptions

regarding their economic independence, competence, and relatedness. Within this framework, it was hypothesised:

**H1:** Career decidedness is positively related to subjective happiness.

## Mediating Role of General Self-Esteem

Self-esteem could be considered one of the most important characteristics in an individual's life. Self-esteem refers to the sense of satisfaction a person has with themselves, based on the alignment between their self-image and ideal self-image (Silber & Tippett, 1965). Self-esteem is also defined as the affective evaluation of one's worth and significance (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). It is a multidimensional and critical psychological construct that encompasses both cognitive and behavioural elements. Because it includes perceptions of one's worth as a person, it is considered a key determinant of an individual's actions. Orth and Robins (2014) suggested that general self-esteem tends to increase from adolescence to adulthood, generally stabilising in adulthood, and it is a determining factor in significant areas of life, such as relationships and work life. Self-esteem has a broader meaning than self-efficacy; it is consistent across settings and assists individuals in dealing with challenges (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is based on beliefs about an individual's talents and the need to plan and carry out certain behaviours to attain specific goals (Schmitz & Schwarzer, 2000; Bandura, 1997). According to Baumeister et al. (2003), self-esteem has a substantial impact on emotional resilience, allowing individuals to recover from stress and failure and contributing to their overall well-being and subjective satisfaction. In addition, self-esteem promotes a sense of personal control and positive attitudes about life occurrences (Rosenberg, 1965). Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to draw attention to their talents and perceive situations positively (Orth & Luciano, 2016).

Self-esteem is a specific domain that requires career counselling for individuals, as low self-esteem could increase career anxiety (Xu & Bhang, 2019). Low self-esteem has a negative impact on career certainty (Lee, 2011). This is because self-esteem is essential in



reducing individuals' fear of failure, thereby decreasing the stress associated with career decision-making. When self-esteem is low, it could adversely affect various aspects of the career development process. Moreover, career decidedness is positively linked to self-esteem, indicating that individuals who have difficulty determining which career path to pursue may face challenges, one of which is a lack of self-esteem (Chartrand et al., 1993; Tokar, 2003). Also, in accordance with SCCT, individuals who have high self-efficacy could envision positive consequences for specific activities they accomplish (Lent et al., 1994). Therefore, the secure outlook on the future created by career decidedness may serve as a precursor to the individual feeling more valuable. Wanberg and Muchinsky (1992) found that undecided students lacked vocational identity and self-esteem. In other words, young people who lack clarity about their careers also tend to have lower self-esteem (Emmanuelle, 2009). According to Super's life-span, life-space theory, an individual's decisions are closely related to their self-perceptions, meaning that career decidedness could serve as a psychological resource, helping the individual feel better about themselves. On the other hand, career decidedness could reduce uncertainties and increase general self-esteem, as the individual is likely to have a more positive self-evaluation. This, in turn, could support more optimistic thoughts about their career (Holtschlag et al., 2018). Moreover, a recent meta-analysis by Udayar et al. (2020) showed that self-esteem is negatively related to career indecisiveness, indicating that perceptions regarding one's worth are closely linked to career decisions. Thus, it was hypothesized:

**H2:** Career decidedness is positively related to general self-esteem.

Self-esteem, as an individual's comprehensive subjective emotional assessment of their own worth, is frequently seen as a vital antecedent of psychological well-being (Du et al., 2017). Numerous studies have identified a positive link between self-esteem and happiness and showed that increased self-esteem correlates with increased happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2006). General self-esteem is advantageous throughout all aspects of life, encompassing relationships, education, employment, and both mental and physiological health (Orth & Robins, 2022). However, some studies have found a significant

relationship between low self-worth and unpleasant emotions (Marshall et al., 2009). In other words, low self-esteem can create a belief that one's self-worth is insufficient, thereby hindering the emergence of positive emotions. Crocker et al. (1994) showed that personal self-esteem positively affects subjective well-being. Moreover, studies indicate that positive affect strengthens the relationship, but negative affect diminishes it (Salavera et al., 2020). Increased self-esteem is advantageous in several life domains, encompassing mental health, social interactions, and general well-being, all of which collectively promote happiness (Ahmad & Siddiqui, 2021), especially for young people (Ng et al., 2019). In addition, it was found that the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction is meaningful among women (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). This information can serve as a basis for exploring general self-esteem and happiness among young women. Additionally, since high self-esteem generates positive emotions, it serves as an important tool for adaptation strategies in various aspects of life among young adults, thereby affecting happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003; Furnham & Cheng, 2000). Thus, it was hypothesised:

**H3:** General self-esteem is positively related to subjective happiness.

According to Baumeister et al. (2003), self-esteem helps individuals regulate themselves better and enables them to respond more effectively to failures, thereby positively affecting life satisfaction. Life satisfaction (Lounsberry et al., 1999) and subjective well-being (Uthayakumar et al., 2010) are both related to career decision-making. Especially for young women, the sense of clarity experienced while making career decisions can enhance self-esteem (Pothukuchi et al., 2014). Societal beliefs, such as the potential expectations of absenteeism and low performance arising from the future maternal role women may assume, could also act as a career barrier in women's participation in the workforce (Liu & Ci, 2024). Thus, women who have more career clarity are better prepared to face uncertainties because they know which path to follow, which could increase their perceived self-worth. It is also important to emphasise that women's general self-esteem is related to their career perceptions which are related to societal culture. Diener and

Diener (1995) emphasised that self-esteem is reinforced through intergroup interactions in collectivist countries. Therefore, it is important to examine the effects of self-esteem on happiness in a collectivist context such as Turkey. Although there is limited knowledge of the mediator role of general self-esteem in the effect of career decidedness on happiness in both international literature and national studies, there are studies that explore the mechanisms of the relationship between career decisions and subjective well-being. In a study conducted with university students in Turkey, it was highlighted that hope acts as a moderator between career decidedness and subjective well-being (Aslan, 2022). Given that a career is a determinant of an individual's social status and life standards based on purchasing power, it is a significant predictor of individual happiness and a component of one's identity. Furthermore, it is proposed that the identity crisis could continue beyond adolescence into emerging adulthood, specifically between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000). Also, studies suggest that since they are about to enter the labour market, young adults tend to prioritise employment prospects (Ng et al., 2019). In this context, the intricate relationship between career decision-making levels, which significantly influence life, and happiness underscores the significance of general self-esteem, a measure of an individual's perceived self-worth. Since general self-esteem is also positively related to happiness (Moza et al., 2019), individuals are more likely to engage in constructive actions with greater resilience and more positive emotions in various areas of life (Balgiu, 2017). Additionally, it is possible to assume that the clarity and certainty that a distinct and definite decision-making process regarding one's career will contribute to an overall subjective happiness by enhancing their general self-esteem (Boo & Kim, 2020; Pothukuchi et al., 2014). Therefore, within the context of Super's life-span life-space theory, it could be expected that the employment decisions and behaviours of young individuals will influence their self-worth perceptions during the emerging adulthood stage (Krahn et al., 2015), which in turn will affect their subjective happiness levels. As predicted by SCCT, since self-perceptions have the potential to influence broader life attitudes in relation to career attitudes (Rasdi & Ahrari, 2020), the following hypothesis has been developed based on theoretical and empirical insights:

**H4:** General self-esteem mediates the relationship between career decidedness and subjective happiness.

## Method

### Analytical Procedure

In this study, data were collected from participants using survey forms through the purposive sampling method. IBM SPSS was used to determine the descriptive statistics, correlations among variables, and reliability. To assess the validity of the measurement instruments, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using IBM AMOS. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was adopted to test the research hypotheses, and IBM AMOS was used. For the mediation test, all indirect effects were examined using SEM with 95% bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

### Participants

The sampling procedure employed in the study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to intentionally choose participants who satisfy particular criteria, guaranteeing that only the selected participants who possess the required traits (e.g., age, employment, experience) are incorporated into the study. This is especially beneficial when examining a specific facet of women's lives or concentrating on a certain demographic segment (Campbell et al., 2020). Furthermore, purposive sampling is beneficial as it requires fewer resources and less time compared to conventional research methodologies (Stratton, 2024). Through this approach, women registered as active students at various public universities, regardless of their employment status, who were seeking jobs, were reached through social and face-to-face networks. The reason for choosing purposive sampling is the cost and time constraints in reaching women in this specific age group who are actively seeking employment. The sample of the study consists of 320 women aged between 18 and 26 who are looking for employment. For this study ethical approval was obtained from the Istanbul University Social and Human

Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Date: 24.06.2024; No: 2609188). And informed consent was obtained from all participants. Furthermore, considering the sample sizes from previous studies on university students' career perceptions concerning career decisions (e.g., Hamzah et al., 2021 (n= 205); Parola et al., 2022 (N= 109); Ran et al., 2022 (N=310), the current study's sample is similar in size yet is particularly concentrated, as it includes only female participants. Given its homogeneity, this sample size could have advantages compared with smaller heterogeneous sample sizes (Jager et al., 2017). The decision was influenced by the fact that young women, due to their age, tend to exert more cognitive effort in career, as these are the years when career becomes an important part of identity formation (Arnett, 2000; Ng et al., 2019). Also, the reason for selecting the 18-26 age group in the study is that it represents the early years of labour force participation. The age distribution of the participants is as follows: 4.4% are 18 years old, 26.3% are 19, 29.4% are 20, 15.3% are 21, 13.4% are 23, 7.5% are 24, 2.5% are 25, and the remaining participants are 26 years old.

## Measurement Tools

**Career Decidedness.** To evaluate the participants' levels of career decidedness, the six-item "*Career Decidedness Scale*" (Lounsberry et al., 1999; Lounsbury et al., 2005) was used. The scale is a 5-point Likert unidimensional scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree), consisting of 6 items. Turkish version of the scale by Akçakanat and Uzunbacak (2019) was used. Higher scores indicate higher level of individuals' career decidedness. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.80 (Akçakanat & Uzunbacak, 2019).

**General Self-Esteem.** "*The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*," developed by Rosenberg in 1965, is a self-assessment tool designed to measure self-esteem. The scale consists of 63 items and is divided into 12 subcategories. These subcategories are labelled as "*self-esteem, continuity of self-concept, trust in people, sensitivity to criticism, depressive affect, daydreaming, psychosomatic symptoms, feeling threatened in interpersonal relationships, degree of participation in discussions, parental interest, relationship with the father, and psychic isolation.*" The translation into Turkish employed a back-translation approach

(Brislin 1970), which is commonly used in the questionnaire translation procedure. Two bilingual researchers translated the English questionnaire into Turkish, which was subsequently translated back into English by another researcher fluent in English. Afterwards, the two researchers reviewed their versions and collaboratively addressed any discrepancies. The self-esteem subscale comprises 10 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree). The internal consistency coefficient was 0.85 in previous studies (e.g. Cheng et al., 2022).

**Happiness.** Global subjective happiness was measured using a 4-item scale developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). The participants declared whether they agreed to the items on a 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all; 5=to a great deal). The translation into Turkish employed a back-translation approach (Brislin 1970), which is commonly used in the questionnaire translation procedure. Two bilingual researchers translated the English questionnaire into Turkish, which was subsequently translated back into English by another researcher fluent in English. Afterwards, the two researchers reviewed their versions and collaboratively addressed any discrepancies. The internal consistency in previous studies was 0.86 (Akin & Satıcı, 2011).

## Findings

### Descriptives

The descriptive statistics and correlation values for the measurement instruments used in the study are presented in Table 1. The mean score for the career-decidedness scale was 3.03; for general self-esteem, it was 3.85; and the mean score for the happiness scale was 3.20. It could be observed that the mean for career decidedness is average, general self-esteem is above average, and happiness is close to the average. The Pearson correlation analysis showed that all variables were positively correlated. Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 were accepted. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha values indicate that career-decidedness has high reliability at 0.82, general self-esteem also shows high reliability at 0.89, while the happiness scale demonstrates an acceptable level of reliability at 0.72. The Average

Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, indicating that the structural validity of the instrument used for measurement was satisfactory with being above the threshold of 0.50 by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values, which are between the +2 and 2 ranges and the kurtosis between the -7 and +7 ranges, suggest that the data conforms to a normal distribution (Byrne, 2016).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables*

| Variables              | Mean | SD   | 1     | 2     | 3 | $\alpha$ | AVE  | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|---|----------|------|----------|----------|
| 1. Career Decidedness  | 3.03 | 0.87 |       |       |   | 0.82     | 0.50 | 0.01     | -0.64    |
| 2. General Self-Esteem | 3.85 | 0.60 | 0.27* |       |   | 0.89     | 0.56 | -0.25    | 0.54     |
| 3. Happiness           | 3.20 | 0.84 | 0.17* | 0.38* |   | 0.72     | 0.50 | -0.17    | -0.03    |

Note: N = 320.  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's alpha, AVE: Average Variance Extracted \*p < .05.

Source: Table by the Authors.

## Measurement Model

After calculating the descriptive statistics and correlations for the research data, alternative measurement models were created to examine the structural validity of the measurement instruments. The model fit was evaluated using the  $\chi^2$  statistic, normed chi-square ( $\chi^2/\text{df}$ ), RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI. RMSEA and SRMR values below 0.05 indicate a good fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992), whereas CFI values of 0.90 or above are considered acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Table 2 presents the fit indices for these alternative models. The models analysed using SEM, included different combinations of career decidedness, general self-esteem, and happiness. The first two-factor model (career decidedness and happiness as a single factor) has a chi-square value ( $\chi^2$ ) of 596.809 with 103 df, and  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio of 5.79. The model has a p-value of 0.000, an RMSEA of 0.12, an SRMR of 0.10, and a CFI of 0.76. The second two-factor model (career decidedness and happiness as a single factor) yields a  $\chi^2$  value of 451.197 with 103 df, giving a  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio of 4.38. This model also has the following fit indices: RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.11, and CFI = 0.83. The third model, a three-factor model (general self-esteem and happiness as a single factor), has a  $\chi^2$  value of 378.432 with 103 df, yielding a  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio of 3.67. The fit indices were RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.07, and CFI = 0.86. The one-factor model has a  $\chi^2$  value of 747.442 with 104 df, giving a

$\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio of 7.18. This model has the following fit indices: RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.11, and CFI = 0.69. The final three-factor model has a  $\chi^2$  value of 183.724 with 100 df, yielding a  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  ratio of 1.83. The following fit indices were obtained from the three-factor model in which all variables were taken as separate factors: RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.04, and CFI = 0.96. When comparing the fit indices, it is observed that the best model is the three-factor model, in which all variables are represented as separate constructs. Therefore, it could be concluded that the measurement instruments used in the study are valid.

**Table 2***Fit Indices for Alternative Measurement Models*

| Model                              | $\chi^2$ | df  | $\chi^2/\text{df}$ | p     | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI  |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----|--------------------|-------|-------|------|------|
| 1. Two-factor model <sup>a</sup>   | 596.809  | 103 | 5.79               | 0.000 | 0.12  | 0.10 | 0.76 |
| 2. Two-factor model <sup>b</sup>   | 451.197  | 103 | 4.38               | 0.000 | 0.10  | 0.11 | 0.83 |
| 3. Three-factor model <sup>c</sup> | 378.432  | 103 | 3.67               | 0.000 | 0.09  | 0.07 | 0.86 |
| 4. One-factor model                | 747.442  | 104 | 7.18               | 0.000 | 0.13  | 0.11 | 0.69 |
| 5. Three-factor model              | 183.724  | 100 | 1.83               | 0.000 | 0.05  | 0.04 | 0.96 |

Note: N = 320. RMSEA root mean square error of approximation; SRMR= standardised root mean square residual; CFI = comparative fit index. a: CD + GSE, HAP; b: CD + HAP, GSE; c: GSE + HAP, CD. CD: Career Decidedness; GSE: General Self-Esteem; HAP: Happiness.

Source: Table by the Authors.

## Structural Model

The relationships between the variables in the study were analysed using SEM. The direct, indirect, and total effects among the variables are presented in Table 3. The analysis revealed that career decidedness has a direct effect of 0.34 on general self-esteem, which is statistically significant. However, the direct effect of career decidedness on happiness was not significant. In addition, general self-esteem has a statistically significant direct effect of 0.44 on happiness. It was observed that general self-esteem plays a mediating role in the effect of career decidedness on happiness. Since the direct effect of career decidedness on happiness is not significant, general self-esteem fully mediates this relationship. Thus, Hypothesis H4 has been accepted.



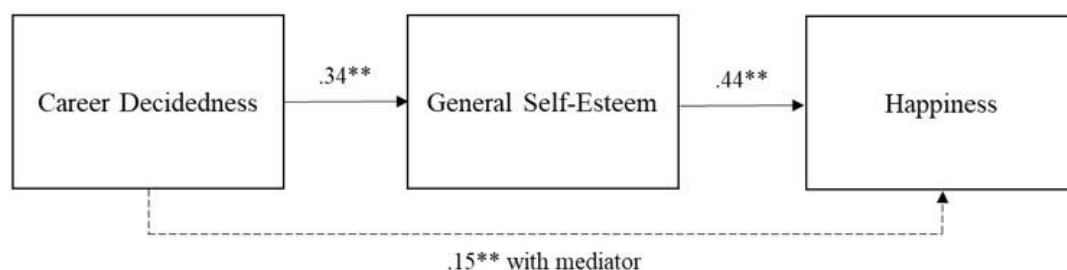
**Table 3***Direct, Indirect, and Total effects*

| Path  | DE     | 95% CI       | IE     | 95% CI      | TE     | 95% CI      |
|---|--------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------|-------------|
| Career Decidedness → General Self-Esteem                  | 0.34** | [0.22;0.44]  |        |             | 0.34** | [0.22;0.44] |
| Career Decidedness → Happiness                            | 0.07   | [-0.05;0.12] |        |             | 0.21** | [0.09;0.33] |
| General Self-Efficacy → Happiness                         | 0.44** | [0.30;0.55]  |        |             | 0.44** | [0.30;0.55] |
| Career Decidedness → General Self Efficacy<br>→ Happiness |        |              | 0.15** | [0.09;0.20] |        |             |

Note: DE = Direct effect; IE = Indirect effect; TE: Total effect; CI = confidence interval.\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . Model fit indices:  $\chi^2 = 183.724$ ,  $df = 100$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.83$ , CFI = 0.96, SRMR = .04, RMSEA = .05,  $p = .000$ .

Source: Table by the Authors.

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the results of the analysis. It has been determined that general self-esteem plays a mediating role in the effect of career decidedness on happiness.

**Figure 1***Mediating effect of general self-esteem on the relationship between career decidedness and happiness*

Source: Figure by the authors.

## Discussion

This study examines the mediating role of general self-esteem in the impact of career decidedness levels on subjective happiness among young women transitioning from higher education to the workforce. Existing research highlights that career decision-making processes are positively related to individuals' self-perceptions (Lent & Brown, 2019). Thus, a high level of clarity regarding one's future career could positively affect their self-perception of worth. Therefore, this sense of worth is anticipated to contribute to an increase in overall happiness (Moza et al., 2019). The influence of general self-esteem on happiness is a well-established finding supported by various studies (Lyubomirsky et

al., 2006; Toker et al., 2021). However, research examining the positive effects of general self-esteem on subjective happiness, particularly within the young women's context, was limited. The findings of this study indicate that career decidedness is positively correlated with both general self-esteem and happiness. This finding showed that as career decidedness increases, young women also experience higher levels of general self-esteem and happiness. In addition, this study examines the effects of career decidedness on general self-esteem and happiness among young women. The findings further demonstrate that career decidedness positively affects general self-esteem. This indicates that higher levels of career decidedness have a positive impact on young women's self-esteem. In other words, women who have made specific career decisions are more likely to have more positive self-evaluations. As expected, based on the SCCT, career decisions are related to self-perceptions. Parallel to previous research (Udayar et al., 2020), this study demonstrates that the development of career decidedness enhances general self-esteem, suggesting that having a certain level of perspective towards the career domain, especially at emerging adulthood, positively contributes to an individual's self-worth.

General self-esteem plays a crucial role during the transition from youth to young adulthood and tends to stabilise after young adulthood (Orth & Robins, 2014). Therefore, general self-esteem is determinative in various areas of individuals' lives, one of which is the future career and workplace. The findings revealed that general self-esteem positively and directly influences happiness, showing that when young women see themselves as valuable, their overall levels of happiness increase. This result aligns with previous studies showing that general self-esteem positively influences subjective happiness (Heatherton & Wyland, 2019). Individuals with a strong sense of self-worth are expected to have higher levels of subjective happiness. While career decidedness does not have a direct significant effect on happiness, it influences happiness through general self-esteem. In other words, the relationship between career decidedness and happiness was mediated by general self-esteem. These findings support the assumption that career decidedness impacts how individuals view their self-worth, and that this positive self-evaluation contributes to higher levels of happiness. Also, as in similar research (Chen, 2018; Pan & Zhou, 2013),

the findings signal that different mechanisms could play a role in the effect of career decidedness on happiness, with general self-esteem being a key factor in this process. The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that career decidedness positively influences life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Karavdic & Bauman, 2014; Lounsbury, 1999; Uthayakumar et al., 2010). Since career decisions are important in both career trajectories and future life satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 2009), individuals' perspectives regarding their desired career paths will determine the job roles they undertake and the organisations they engage with in the future. Moreover, the examination of career decisions, particularly within the context of women, could be said to significantly influence not only their participation in the labour force but also their overall well-being (Lietzmann & Frodermann, 2021).

This study highlights the important effect of general self-esteem on the relationship between career decidedness and happiness. The results indicate that an established career direction not only improves self-esteem but also promotes increased subjective happiness. Career transitions represent a pivotal stage in the lives of young women, and enhancing self-esteem at this stage may function as an effective strategy for developing sustainable happiness and life satisfaction.

## Theoretical Implications

In this study, the effects of young women's career decisions on happiness were examined through the lens of Super's life-span, life-space theory and SCCT, with general self-esteem serving as a mediating variable. The findings indicate, as in Super's theory, that the career domain could contribute to overall happiness through general self-esteem. However, based on this study, it is also recommended to explore the relationships between career and happiness from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2012), is a framework that explains the relationship between individual motivation and subjective well-being. According to this theory, individuals have psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which they strive to fulfil through intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors. Within this

framework, career decidedness could be viewed as one of the psychological needs. Therefore, future research could use this theory to better understand how various perceptions of career decisions influence well-being.

## Practical Implications

Examining career decidedness, general self-esteem, and happiness specifically among young women in Turkey highlights the importance of career decisions for women, the significance of the career field in terms of general self-esteem, and the impacts of these two variables on happiness. The results of this study could guide public institutions in providing various incentives, policies, and training to increase career awareness among young women. Family and tax policies can increase women's participation in employment (Warnecke et al., 2008). These policies could also strengthen career decisions. Guidance programs related to career awareness and career counselling services could enhance the general self-esteem levels of young women. Empowering young women in this domain could contribute significantly to societal well-being by increasing their overall happiness levels. Public institutions could also perform these initiatives through universities. Various career workshops could be organised both face-to-face and online specifically for young women. Moreover, assessments of career decisions during recruitment processes in the private sector can provide insights into candidates' self-evaluations. Furthermore, it is advisable to develop course content in universities that is designed to improve career decidedness. The effects of these courses on general self-esteem could be measured at the class level, and their temporal development could be monitored (Gerçek, 2020). In addition, researchers could examine the correlations between career choices, general self-esteem, and happiness across various demographic groups. For instance, comparisons could be made between men and women, and different age groups could be addressed in addition to socioeconomic status.

## Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, it relies on cross-sectional data, which limits the ability to examine changes over time. Future studies could enhance the findings by incorporating longitudinal designs with multiple data points. Additionally, the results of this study are confined to the sample used, and future research could benefit from using more diverse groups from various geographical locations. Additionally, since this study was conducted with a sample consisting solely of women, the results are specific to this particular group. Investigating the relationships between career decidedness and happiness across different professional fields, majors, and age groups could offer broader insights. Moreover, as evidence shows that the link between career decidedness and happiness could be shaped by other processes, it is recommended that future research explore factors other than general self-esteem. These may include career adaptability, career optimism, and self-perceived employability. Factors such as career choice, social support, and work centrality could also be examined as potential moderators of the relationship between career decidedness and happiness. Despite its limitations, this study provides a foundational framework on the connections between career decidedness, general self-esteem, and happiness of young women, which can serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, HR experts, industrial and organisational psychologists, career counsellors, and researchers.



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|----------------------|--|
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