

Do Difficulties in Career Affect Life Satisfaction? Examining the Relationships Between Life Satisfaction, Career Decision Regret, and Career Distress

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Abstract: Life satisfaction, which is an important indicator of the well-being and happiness of individuals, can be affected by different development areas of the individual. On this basis, the experiences of individuals regarding their career development processes may also have an impact on life satisfaction. In the current study, which was carried out to test this, the mediating role of career distress in the relationship between individuals' career decision regret and life satisfaction was examined. The current study was carried out with 321 university students. The participants' ages spanned from 18 to 26, with an average age of 20.78 years. The data was gathered using The Satisfaction with Life Scale, The Career Decision Regret Scale, and The Career Distress Scale and was analyzed using the structural equation modeling method. The results revealed that life satisfaction is negatively related to both career decision regret and career distress. Another important finding is that career distress has a fully mediating role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. The results were deliberated in light of pertinent literature, and recommendations were offered concerning the outcomes.

Keywords: Career decision regret, career distress, life satisfaction.

Kariyerdeki Zorluklar Yaşam Doyumunu Etkiler Mi? Yaşam Doyumu, Kariyer Karar Pişmanlığı ve Kariyer Sıkıntısı Arasındaki İlişkilerin İncelenmesi

Öz: Bireylerin refah ve mutluluğunun önemli bir göstergesi olan yaşam doyumunu, bireyin farklı gelişim alanlarından etkilenmektedir. Bu temelde bireylerin kariyer gelişim süreçlerine ilişkin deneyimleri de yaşam doyumunu etkileyebilmektedir. Bunu test etmek amacıyla yapılan bu çalışmada bireylerin kariyer karar pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumunu arasındaki ilişkide kariyer sıkıntısının aracılık rolü incelenmiştir. Mevcut çalışma 321 üniversite öğrencisi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcıların yaşları 18 ila 26 arasında olup ortalama yaş 20.78'dir. Veriler Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği, Kariyer Kararı Pişmanlık Ölçeği ve Kariyer Sıkıntısı Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmış ve yapısal eşitlik modelleme yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular yaşam doyumunun hem kariyer kararı pişmanlığı hem de kariyer sıkıntısı ile negatif ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bir diğer önemli bulgu ise kariyer kararı pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumunu arasındaki ilişkide kariyer sıkıntısının tam aracılık rolüne sahip olmasıdır. Sonuçlar ilgili literatür ışığında tartışılmış ve sonuçlara ilişkin önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kariyer karar pişmanlığı, kariyer sıkıntısı, yaşam doyumunu.

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Introduction

Achieving life satisfaction is a fundamental component necessary for people to experience happiness and find meaning in their lives (Dagli & Baysal, 2016). The concept of life satisfaction has become one of the main topics focused on by researchers, as the science of psychology moves away from the problem-oriented perspective and focuses on the well-being and happiness of individuals. Life satisfaction is accepted as the individual's reaching a cognitive judgment about their life as a result of evaluating their life from a subjective window (Diener, 1984; Nam & Akbay, 2020; Pavot & Diener, 1993). In this evaluation, the individual evaluates the living conditions according to her/his own criteria and as a result of this evaluation, she/he puts a value on their life (Argyle, 2013). These evaluations of life include the past, present, and future living conditions of the individual (Diener & Lucas, 1999). In other words, life satisfaction is based on the subjective evaluation of the individual's quality of life by herself/himself (Huebner et al., 2006).

Recent domestic studies have revealed that life satisfaction is associated with important variables such as psychological flexibility and general self-efficacy (Ates & Saglar, 2022), quality of life and psychological well-being (Demir et al., 2021), communication skills (Ates & Saglar, 2022), sense of integrity (Kucuksen et al., 2023), hope and positive future expectation (Atilla & Yildirim, 2023), and intolerance to uncertainty (Karatas & Tagay, 2021). In current international studies, it is seen that life satisfaction is related to structures such as psychological distress (Duong, 2021), quality of life (Bidzan-Bluma et al., 2020), well-being and happiness (Ruggeri et al., 2020), optimism, and general health (Tavakoly-Sany et al., 2021). The research findings reveal that life satisfaction is a structure that has the potential to be associated with almost every aspect of an individual's life. This situation makes it much more important to determine the variables that can affect life satisfaction in order to activate protective and preventive factors.

Recent years have witnessed shifts in the nature of challenges faced by university students, with a noticeable rise in the problems encountered (Gizir, 2010). One of the main areas of development in which university students in young adulthood experience difficulties is career (Yerin-Guneri & Capa-Aydin, 2010; 2012). In the 21st century, depending on both economic and technological changes, the understanding of career has changed greatly compared to the past (Spurk et al., 2011). Accordingly, in order for young people to have a successful and healthy career development process, they need to have a number of new competencies different from usual (Erten, 2020). It is emphasized that the inability to have these competencies in the career development process is related to the career problems of individuals (Hirschi, 2011; Praskova et al., 2015). In addition, the regrets experienced by young individuals as a result of their career decisions may also negatively affect their career development processes (Doganulku & Seker, 2023; Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017). Indeed, a study involving individuals during this period unveiled that students didn't perceive themselves as sufficiently informed about making university choices (Anilan et al., 2008).

Studies show that career experiences can be effective on individuals' life satisfaction (e.g., Hagmaier et al., 2018; Hirschi et al., 2016). Career distress (Benton et al., 2003; Creed et al., 2016) and career decision regret (Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017) are important career life elements that can be observed in university students. Therefore, career distress and career decision regret can have an impact on life satisfaction as they are important elements in the career fields of individuals. Testing and demonstrating this empirically will be an important guide for both researchers and practitioners in order to prevent the decrease in life satisfaction due to career development processes. In this context, this current research will examine university students' life satisfaction from a career perspective (career distress and career decision regret) and reveal the relationship pattern between related variables.

The relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction

People encounter numerous decisions throughout their lifetimes (Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017). One of the important decision areas in life is career (Kose, 2019). Individuals make many career-related decisions in order to shape their future lives. They make these decisions in line with certain expectations (Doganulku & Seker, 2023). However, as a result of a decision taken for career processes, if these wishes and expectations are not met sufficiently, a feeling of regret may arise (Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017). This indicates career decision regret.

Career decision regret is a feeling that arises when individuals compare their current career decisions with their alternatives (Galinsky et al., 2005; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). In other words, it is the individual's regret about their decision as "I wish I hadn't made this choice" (Maingay, 1991). As with many decisions made in life, it is of great importance to evaluate the decision in the context of the possible consequences of the decisions made for the career of the individual. The career decision of the individual has the potential to affect their whole life (Ipek et al., 2020). The regret that may be felt after the decision can negatively affect the life of the individual. Because regret is a strong and negative emotion (Bonifield & Cole, 2007; Le & Ho, 2020). Individuals become open to experiencing many compelling emotions such as disappointment, self-blame, unhappiness, and remorse in addition to regret as a result of regretting their career decisions (Maingay, 1991; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). These strong emotions that individuals feel are an effective element in their lives (Diener & Larsen, 1993).

Positive and negative emotions that people have about their lives are powerful structures that can affect their life satisfaction (Diener & Larsen, 1993; Ipek et al., 2020). Indeed, Deniz et al. (2012) revealed that positive emotions were positively related to life satisfaction, and negative emotions were negatively related to life satisfaction. Career is an important development area that is effective in an individual's life (Super, 1980). In addition, it is claimed that vocational decisions will increase life satisfaction along with job satisfaction (Ipek et al., 2020). Hence, it can be asserted that the adverse emotions individuals feel toward their career domains might also influence their overall life satisfaction. Kose (2019) revealed in his research with teachers that career decision regret is a predictor of life satisfaction. The results of the study are consistent with the presented viewpoint.

Life satisfaction, in the most general sense, is the individual's positive evaluation of his/her life according to his/her own subjective criteria (Diener et al., 1985). It is an individual's evaluation of general satisfaction with their life rather than their satisfaction in certain areas (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Life satisfaction is also explained as a measure of reaching the goals that the individual has set for herself/himself (Aysan & Bozkurt, 2004). Individuals may regret their career decision when the thought that the career decision taken by the individual does not reach their goals is dominant (Galinsky et al., 2005; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). In other words, this shows that the career decision of the individual did not meet their expectations. Considering this situation in terms of university students, the realization of expectations increases life satisfaction, while the opposite of this has a decreasing effect on life satisfaction (Tanhan, 2019). Conversely, findings have shown a connection between regret regarding career decisions and individuals' satisfaction with their careers (Kose, 2019). Accordingly, it can be stated that the satisfaction of individuals with their career decisions may contribute to their avoidance of career conflicts. It is stated that the fact that individuals are away from conflicts related to their careers is a source of an increase in life satisfaction (Turker & Celik, 2019). Individuals' lack of regret about their career decision reflects their satisfaction with the career decision and their inner sense of accomplishment. Thus, career satisfaction increases the life satisfaction of the individual and can direct the individual towards well-being (Denizli & Dundar, 2020). Based on the literature information and past research findings mentioned above, it can be said that the career decision regrets of individuals can be an effective structure on their life satisfaction. In this context, the following hypothesis has been formulated for examination:

H₁: University students' career decision regrets predict their life satisfaction negatively.

The mediator role of career distress

One of the developing and compelling reactions to the difficulties experienced by individuals in their career development processes is career distress. Career distress is defined as individuals feeling distressed and having difficulty in making career decisions, avoiding career thoughts, or setting goals (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). Career distress includes a range of negative feelings about a person's career, such as depression, stress, anxiety, and helplessness (Creed et al., 2016). Although career distress is very common and affects young adults in many ways, research in this area is reported to be weak (Sensoy & Siyez, 2019). Also, despite the importance of the construct, the nomological net supporting it is not fully understood (Creed et al., 2016). In this context, it is clear that there is a need for research to determine the antecedents and consequences of career difficulties, especially in young individuals who are at the beginning of their careers.

Unsuccessful career attempts have also been associated with increased career distress in individuals (Burke, 1991; Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982). In addition, career distress is expressed as a product of structures that may be associated with career decision regret, such as career indecision (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Lipshits-Braziler et al., 2016; Walker & Peterson, 2012), career incompatibility (Schwatken, 2014), and poor career preparation (Skorikov, 2007). In this context, it can be stated that individuals may experience career distress because of career decision regret. On the other hand, career distress involves negative emotions (Larson et al., 1994). The feeling of regret about the career decision of the individual is a strong and negative emotion (Zeelenberg et al., 1998). This may be effective in individuals' career decision regrets being a source of increase in career distress.

The life processes of individuals regarding their careers are effective and powerful sources of life satisfaction (Appleton & Song, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Therefore, career distress may be a predictor of life satisfaction. Career distress is a reaction that individuals develop towards career processes (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). In this context, it can be effective on individuals' life satisfaction. On the other hand, career distress is closely related to some negative psychological processes of individuals. Career distress can be effective in individuals experiencing psychological difficulties such as stress, anxiety, helplessness, and depression (Creed et al., 2016). Studies show that negative outcomes such as depression and stress (Sari et al., 2019), anxiety (Baykal, 2020) and helplessness (Arslan, 2015) are psychological factors associated with life satisfaction. Therefore, career distress can be an effective factor in decreasing the life satisfaction of individuals. The above-mentioned literature on career distress and the results of previous research show that this variable has the potential to be affected by the structures of career processes such as career decision regret. On the other hand, it indicates that career distress is a variable that can affect other areas of an individual's life, and

accordingly, it can be an effective structure on individuals' life satisfaction. In other words, it can be said that career distress is the result of career decision regret and an antecedent of life satisfaction. On this basis, the following hypothesis has been developed to test it.

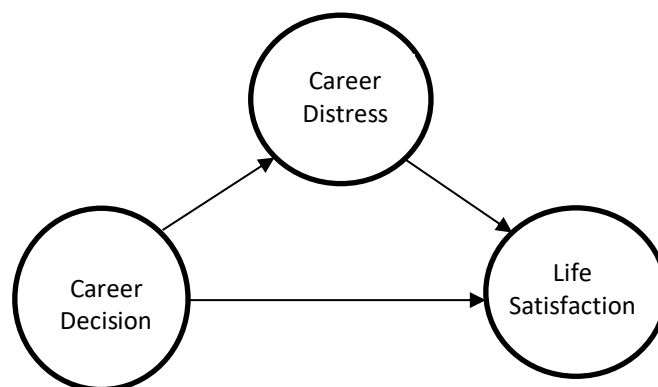
H₂: University students' career distress has a mediating role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction.

The present study

Life satisfaction is one of the most basic indicators of the well-being of individuals (Dolan et al., 2008). It expresses an individual's judgment of how their life is as a whole, rather than their immediate emotional state (Diener, 1994; Diener & Diener, 1995). Therefore, it is different from the concept of happiness, which indicates the subjective and instant emotional state of the individual (Whalen, 2016). Life satisfaction includes the individuals being at peace with their own life, approving what she/he has experienced, being satisfied with it, and being happy with all of them (Sumner, 1996). Studies have shown that life satisfaction is associated with high self-esteem, achievement, less stress, less loneliness, and less depression, that is, life satisfaction plays an important role in psychological health (Civitci, 2012; Dolan et al., 2008; Proctor et al., 2009). In this context, it is important to determine the mechanisms that can affect the life satisfaction of individuals. In particular, revealing the predictors of life satisfaction in young adult individuals, who are expected to have a long future, will shed light on the studies to be carried out to increase life satisfaction.

The expectations of the working world have changed greatly compared to the past. In addition, in the 21st century, individuals have had to do different things than ever before in the transition to working life and career processes (Sonnentag, 2017; Uy et al., 2015). This situation caused individuals to experience difficulties related to their careers and attracted the attention of researchers (e.g., Herrmann et al., 2015; Hirschi et al., 2015). Indeed, the career development processes of students, especially in the university process, have become a structure that has been studied extensively by researchers recently. While this situation is important in terms of illuminating the career processes of individuals, it is important in terms of revealing the effects of career experiences on other areas of life. Because individuals' career-oriented experiences can also be effective in other areas of their lives (Appleton & Song, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Therefore, it is also important to reveal what kind of a reflection the career experiences of university students who are in the transition to working life have on their lives in this period. It is stated that one of the important areas in which individuals have problems during the university period is their career (Gizir, 2005). It is possible that individuals who have decided on university and undergraduate programs during their adolescence have not been able to make these decisions in a way that best reflects them, and they regret it because of this. In addition, it is stated that university students have intense career distress (Schwatken, 2014). It is emphasized that the career-oriented experiences of individuals are effective on their life satisfaction (Appleton & Song, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In parallel with these views, it can be thought that life satisfaction of individuals may be affected by career decision regret and career distress. In this context, the objective of the conducted study is to investigate if career distress plays a mediating role in the relationship between career decision regret and the life satisfaction of university students. The hypothetical model of the current study developed for this aim is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Research Model



Method

The Participants

Participants of the study are university students in Türkiye (N = 321). Participants' ages fall within the range of 18 to 26. The average age is 20.78 (SD = 1.63). 39.3% (N = 126) of the participants were male and 60.7% (N = 195) were female. Perceived socio-economic levels are as follows: 13.7% (N = 44) low, 81.6% (N = 262) moderate, and 4.7% (N = 15) high. The regrets of the participants regarding their careers are as follows: 43% (N = 138) not regretful, 39.6% (N = 127) a little regretful, 13.7% (N = 44) regretful, and 3.7% (N = 12) very regretful.

Measures

Demographic information form (age, gender, perceived socio-economic level, state of regret), The Career Decision Regret Scale, The Career Distress Scale, and Life Satisfaction Scale were used to collect the current study data.

The Career Decision Regret Scale (CDRS)

CDRS was developed by Brehaut et al. (2003). The scale measures the level of regret of the individual's career decision. The scale, a 5-point Likert-type (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Totally Agree), consists of one dimension and five items. Increasing scores on the scale indicate that career decision regret increases. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Erdurcan and Kirdok (2017).

The Career Distress Scale (CDS)

CDS was developed by Creed et al. (2016). The scale measures individuals' career distress. The scale is a 6-point Likert-type (1: Strongly disagree to 6: Strongly agree). CDS consists of one dimension and nine items. An increase in total scores shows an increase in the individual's career stress. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Sensoy and Siyez (2019).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS)

SLS was developed by Diener et al. (1985). The scale assesses the life satisfaction of individuals using a 7-point Likert-type format (1: Strongly disagree to 7: Strongly agree). SLS comprises a single dimension with five items. An elevation in the cumulative scores from the scale indicates a corresponding rise in life satisfaction. The Turkish version of the scale was adapted by Koker (1991).

Data Analysis

Before commencing the analysis, an examination of the data distribution was conducted. Skewness and kurtosis within the range of +1.5 to -1.5 were considered acceptable criteria for the normal data distribution. The fact that the obtained values are in this range indicates that the distribution of the data is normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). As seen in Table 1, the skewness and kurtosis values of the data belonging to the scores used within the scope of the research are between +1.5 and -1.5. In other words, the distribution of the scores used in the research is normal. In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistics, internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach Alpha), and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. The mediating role of career distress in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction was analyzed using the structural equation model (SEM). In assessing the SEM, $\chi^2/df < 5$; CFI, GFI $> .90$; RMSEA $< .10$ was taken as a good fit indices' criterion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). The bootstrap method was used to examine the mediating role (10.000 resampling). When assessing the significance of both direct and indirect effects, confidence intervals that did not include zero were considered the criterion, as outlined by Hayes (2013). IBM AMOS 24 and IBM SPSS 28 were used for data analysis.

Ethical Approval

Within the scope of the research, the participants were informed through the informed consent form. All of the participants voluntarily participated in the study. The research was carried out according to the 1975 Helsinki Declaration. In addition, ethical approval was obtained from the corresponding author's institution prior to the study (Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University; 12-2023/181, Number of Committee Decision).

Findings

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics related to the study variables.

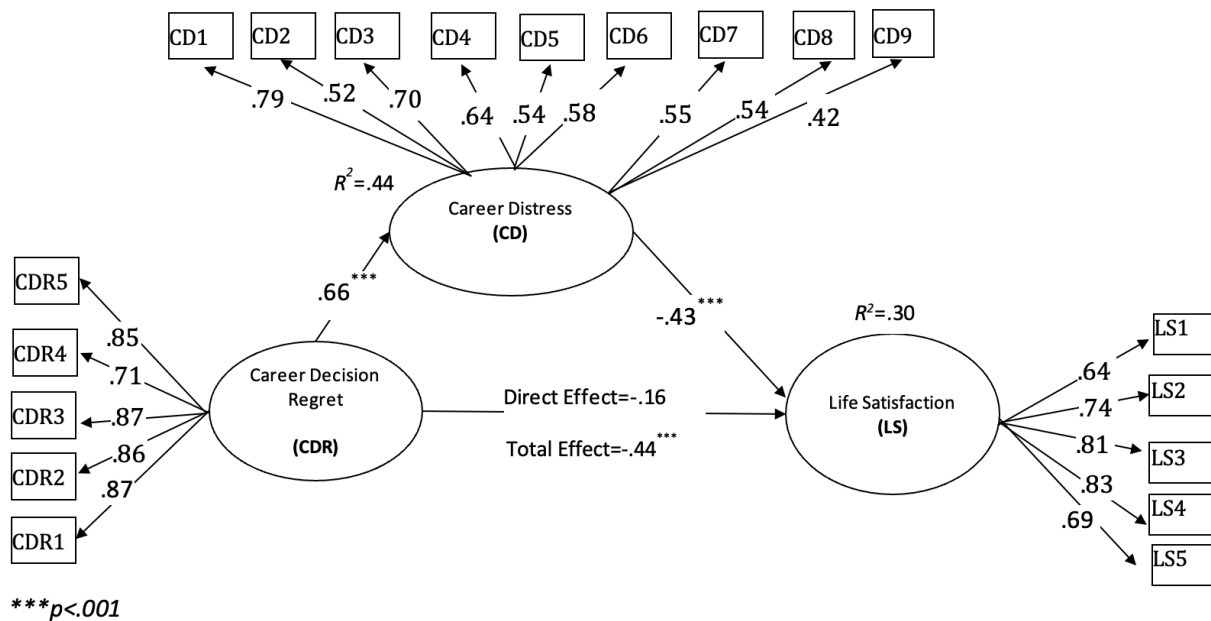
Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Career Decision Regret	.92		
2. Career Distress	.54	.87	
3. Life Satisfaction	-.41	-.48	.87
Mean	27.20	28.72	14.03
SD	20.55	8.24	3.93
Skewness	.64	.05	-.03
Kurtosis	-.06	-.18	-.48

Note: N = 321. Diagonals indicate reliabilities. All correlations are significant at the $p < .001$ level.

As seen in Table 1, career decision regret was negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = -.41, p < .001$). In addition, career decision regret was positively correlated with career distress ($r = .54, p < .001$). Lastly, career distress was negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = -.48, p < .001$). Figure 1 shows the direct and indirect effects (mediating role) of career distress in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction.

Figure 2.
Findings of the Research Model



It has been found that the goodness of fit indices of the research model shows good fit [$\chi^2 = 374.679, df = 148, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.53; GFI = .904; CFI = .934; RMSEA = .065$ (90% CI = .056 to .073)]. In the model, it is seen that career decision regret predicts career distress positively ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). In addition, it was found that the direct effect of career decision regret on life satisfaction was not significant. The indirect effect of career decision regret on life satisfaction is significant ($\beta = -.28, p < .001$). It can be said that career distress has a full mediator role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. The confidence intervals of the indirect and direct effects of the study variables are given in Table 2.

Table 2.
Findings of the Mediation Analysis

Pathway	B	S.E.	C.R.	Coefficient	CI Lower-bound	CI Upper-bound
Total effect						
CDR→LS				-.44***	-.53	-.34
Direct effects						
CDR → LS	-.13	.06	-2.09	-.16	-.32	.02
CDR → CD	1.01	.09	11.46	.66***	.57	.74
CD → LS	-.24	.05	-5.13	-.43***	-.61	-.25
Indirect effect						
CDR → CD → LS				-.28***	-.42	-.16

*** $p < .001$; $N = 321$.

Note: CI: Confidence Interval Bias %95; CDR: Career Decision Regret; CD: Career Distress; LS: Life Satisfaction Scale.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

In this current study, university students' life satisfaction was examined from the perspective of career decision regret and career distress. In the current study, it was concluded that life satisfaction was negatively related to career decision regret and career distress. One of the most important results reached in the research is that career distress plays a full mediator role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. The findings obtained in the research are thoroughly discussed below, drawing upon existing literature and previous research results.

The first hypothesis of the study, H_1 , suggests that university students' career decision regrets are a negative predictor of their life satisfaction. In the findings, although career decision regret does not directly predict life satisfaction negatively, it indirectly predicts life satisfaction negatively. Therefore, the obtained findings confirm this hypothesis. According to the findings, career decision regrets of university students have a negative effect on the change in their life satisfaction. In the literature review, no research was found in which university students' career decision regret and life satisfaction were examined together. However, in a study conducted with teachers, it was concluded that career decision regret is related to life satisfaction (Kose, 2019). The result reached in this study is in parallel with the current study's findings. Career decision regret reflects the individual's dissatisfaction with their career choice (Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017). If individuals do not make a career choice in accordance with their life preferences, the possible consequences of this situation will directly affect the life of the individual in the following periods and the individual will be unsuccessful and unproductive because of an inappropriate career decision (Oztemel, 2012; Sarikaya & Khorshid, 2009). The fact that individuals feel unsuccessful and unproductive has a negative effect on life satisfaction (Avsaroglu et al., 2005; Karaaslan et al., 2020). The fact that increased career decision regret is associated with decreased life satisfaction may develop depending on this situation. In addition, research findings show that career decision regret can have an impact on individuals' career lives such as burnout (Doganulku & Kirdok, 2021) and low level of vocational satisfaction (Kose, 2019). The career life processes of the individual have an impact on their life satisfaction (Appleton & Song, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). As a result, it can be said that negative career experiences due to career decision regret may cause a decrease in individuals' life satisfaction.

Another hypothesis of the study, H_2 , suggests that career distress has a mediating role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. The findings obtained as a result of the analyzes confirmed this hypothesis. Career distress played a full mediator role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. This result shows that increasing career decision regret causes an increase in career distress in individuals, and this situation causes a decrease in life satisfaction. Career decision regret is a feeling that an individual experiences toward their career decision. Regret is a powerful emotion (Zeelenberg et al., 1998). Negative emotions experienced by individuals toward their careers can cause them to experience career distress (Larson et al., 1994). In this context, increasing career decision regret can lead to an increase in career distress. In addition, career decision regret can lead to the development of situations that are closely related to career distress, such as career indecision (Constantine & Flores, 2006; Lipshits-

Brazilier et al., 2016; Walker & Peterson, 2012), career incompatibility (Schwatken, 2014), and poor career preparation (Skorikov, 2007), which are compelling for individuals' careers. Accordingly, increasing career decision regret may have an impact on individuals' career distress. On the other hand, career distress is a challenging situation that individuals may experience regarding their careers (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). The individual's encounter with difficult situations can cause them to wear out and this may cause a decrease in their life satisfaction (Dymecka et al., 2021; Gawrych et al., 2021; Krok et al., 2021). In addition, individuals' career difficulties are the source of their psychological problems (Creed et al., 2016). Psychological problems such as depression and stress (Sarı et al., 2019), anxiety (Baykal, 2020), and helplessness (Arslan, 2015) are situations that have negative effects on individuals' life satisfaction. Therefore, career distress can have an impact on individuals' life satisfaction.

The finding that career distress has a full mediator role in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction is a valuable finding. University students may regret their career choices after high school during the university process. Making healthy career choices for the university process requires considering interests, abilities, values, and expectations together (Aydemir, 2018; Kiyak, 2006; Sarikaya & Khorshid, 2009). However, Anilan et al. (2008) revealed in their study that students do not consider themselves knowledgeable enough about university choice. The individual gets placed in an undergraduate program by making a choice after high school. After placing in an undergraduate program at the university, individuals may not be satisfied with the education received at the university or their future career options. Feeling that the expectations of the individual regarding the career decision are not met may cause career decision regret (Erdurcan & Kirdok, 2017). The individual has entered an educational process and has wasted effort, and time. In other words, there are some accumulated costs in their life (Blau, 2003). Depending on this, the individual may not attempt to choose a different undergraduate program or to get a re-education. In this case, carrying out studies on which individuals will find different ways towards their career, such as the creation of alternatives within their career processes, may prevent their feelings of regret about their career decision in the past from creating a career problem and creating a negative impact on their life satisfaction.

This current study has some limitations. Despite these limitations, recommendations aligned with the research results can be proposed for practitioners and researchers. The current study is cross-sectional and designed in relational design. Therefore, making causal inferences about study results may be misleading. Within the scope of the study, no information was received from the participants about whether they have already received psychological counseling or career counseling. Psychological counseling can have a manipulative effect on individuals' life satisfaction, and career counseling can have a manipulative effect on career decision regret and career distress. This constitutes a limitation of the present study. This research was conducted with university students. The difficulties faced by individuals who are not involved in working life towards their careers and the career difficulties of individuals in working life may differ. Therefore, conducting similar studies with working individuals and comparing the results will add breadth to the literature. In applications to increase the life satisfaction of university students, career-related features can also be included in the process. In these studies, the possible low life satisfaction of young people can be prevented by studies and practices to reduce career decision regrets and career distress of individuals. While psychological counselors work with clients who receive counseling services due to low life satisfaction, they can also discuss their career processes in sessions and get information about whether they have career decision regret and career distress. If there are problems with these concepts, it is possible to work with clients to overcome these problems. In this regard, they can even get supervision from career counselors for their clients or refer their clients to career counselors. Under the coordination of university career centers, a positive contribution can be made to improving the life satisfaction of individuals by conducting training and studies that prevent university students from experiencing career decision regret and career distress. In this current study, the mediating role of career distress in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction was examined. It is recommended to conduct research to determine different variables that may play a moderator or mediator role (e.g., proactive career behaviors, visions about the future, positivity) in the relationship between career decision regret and life satisfaction. Career intervention programs can be developed to reduce individuals' career decision regrets and career distress, experimental design studies can be designed, and the effect of these intervention programs on individuals' life satisfaction can be tested.

Ethics Committee Approval Information

Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University; 12-2023/181, Number of Committee Decision.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest within the scope of this current study.

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Author Contributions

Hacı Arif DOĐANLK and Ozan KORKMAZ contributed equally to the planning, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of the study.”

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş

İnsanların yaşamlarında mutlu olabilmeleri ve yaşamlarının bir anlam kazanabilmesi için sahip olmaları gereken temel unsurlardan birisi yaşam doyumudur (Dağlı ve Baysal, 2016). Psikoloji biliminin sorun odaklı bakış açısından uzaklaşıp bireylerin iyilik hali ve mutluluğuna odaklanması ile birlikte yaşam doyumu kavramı araştırmacılar tarafından sıklıkla ele alınan temel konulardan birisi haline gelmiştir. Yapılan araştırmalar yaşam doyumunun yüksek benlik saygısı, başarı, daha az stres, daha az yalnızlık, daha az depresyonla ilişkili olduğunu yani yaşam doyumunun psikolojik sağlıkta önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermiştir (Çivitçi, 2012; Dolan ve diğerleri, 2008; Duong, 2021; Proctor ve diğerleri, 2009). Ayrıca yaşam doyumunun psikolojik esneklik ve genel öz yeterlik (Ateş ve Sağlar, 2022), yaşam kalitesi (Bidzan-Bluma ve diğerleri, 2020; Demir ve diğerleri, 2021), iletişim becerileri (Ateş ve Sağlar, 2022), bütünlük duygusu (Küçükşen ve diğerleri, 2023), umut ve olumlu gelecek beklentisi (Atilla ve Yıldırım, 2023), belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlük (Karataş ve Tagay, 2021) gibi önemli değişkenler ile ilişkili olduğu ortaya konmuştur.

Bireylerin yaşam doyumları ile ilişkisi olan bir diğer alan ise kariyer yaşantılarıdır (Hagmaier ve diğerleri, 2018; Hirschi ve diğerleri, 2016). Dolayısıyla yaşam doyumunun kariyer gelişim alanı açısından ele alması da önemli olacaktır. 21. Yüzyıl ile birlikte gerek ekonomik gerekse teknolojik değişimlere bağlı olarak kariyer anlayışı geçmişe kıyasla büyük değişim göstermiştir (Spurk ve diğerleri, 2011). Buna bağlı olarak gençlerin kariyer gelişim süreçlerini başarılı ve sağlıklı geçirebilmeleri adına her zamankinden farklı ve yeni birtakım yetkinliklere sahip olmaları gerekmektedir (Erten, 2020). Gelişim süreci içerisinde bu yetkinliklere sahip olunamamasının bireylerin kariyer sıkıntıları ile ilişkili olduğu vurgulanmaktadır (Hirschi, 2011; Praskova ve diğerleri, 2015). Kariyer sıkıntısı bireylerin kariyer gelişim süreçlerinde yaşadığı zorluklara yönelik gelişebilen ve zorlayıcı nitelikte olan tepkilerden birisidir. Kariyer sıkıntısı bireylerin kariyer kararı verme, kariyer düşüncelerinden kaçınma veya hedef belirleme konularında sıkıntı hissetmesi ve zorlanması olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Creed ve Gagliardi, 2015). Genç yetişkinler arasında kariyer sıkıntısı oldukça yaygındır, öyle ki üniversite öğrencileri bu sıkıntıları için kampüsteki fırsatları keşfetmeye başvururlar (Schwatken, 2014). Ayrıca kariyer sıkıntısı, bir kişinin kariyeri ile ilgili depresyon, stres, kaygı ve çaresizlik gibi bir dizi olumsuz duygularını da yansıtır (Creed ve diğerleri, 2016). Yaşanan kariyer sıkıntısına bağlı gelişen bu olumsuz durumlar ise bireylerin yaşam doyumlarının azalması için bir kaynak haline gelebilir.

Kariyer sıkıntısının yanında genç bireylerin kariyerlerine yönelik kararları sonucunda yaşadığı pişmanlıklar da onların kariyer gelişim süreçlerine olumsuz yansımaktadır (Doğanülkü ve Şeker, 2023; Erdurcan ve Kırdök, 2017). Kariyer karar pişmanlığı, bireylerin mevcut kariyer kararlarını alternatifleri ile karşılaştırdıklarında ortaya çıkan bir duygudur (Galinsky ve diğerleri, 2005; Zeelenberg ve Pieters, 2007). Diğer bir ifade ile bireyin kararına ilişkin "Keşke bu seçimi yapmasaydım." şeklindeki pişmanlıktır (Maingay, 1991). Bireyler gelecek hayatlarına yön vermek adına kariyerleri ile ilişkili birçok karar verirler. Bu kararlarını birtakım beklentiler doğrultusunda yaparlar (Doğanülkü ve Şeker, 2023). Ancak kariyer süreçlerine yönelik alınmış bir kararın ilerideki sonucu olarak, bu isteklerin ve beklentilerin yeterince karşılanmaması durumunda ise pişmanlık duygusu ortaya çıkabilmektedir (Erdurcan ve Kırdök, 2017). Pişmanlık güçlü ve olumsuz bir duygudur (Bonifield ve Cole, 2007; Le ve Ho, 2020). Bireyler kariyer kararlarına yönelik pişmanlık duymaları sonucunda pişmanlığa ek olarak hayal kırıklığı, kendini suçlama, mutsuzluk ve vicdan azabı gibi birçok zorlayıcı duyguları da beraberinde yaşamaya açık hale gelirler (Maingay, 1991; Zeelenberg ve Pieters, 2007). Bireylerin hissettiği bu güçlü duygular ise yaşamları üzerinde etkili birer unsurdur (Diener ve Larsen, 1993). İnsanların yaşantılarına yönelik sahip oldukları olumu ve olumsuz duygular onların yaşam doyumları üzerinde etkili olabilen güçlü yapılardır. (Diener ve Larsen, 1993; İpek ve diğerleri, 2020). Nitekim Deniz ve diğerleri (2012) olumlu duyguların yaşam doyumu ile pozitif, olumsuz duyguların ise yaşam doyumu ile negatif yönde ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymuşlardır. Dolayısıyla kariyer karar pişmanlığı da yaşam doyumunu azaltıcı bir unsur olabilir.

Diğer yandan kariyer sıkıntısı, kariyer karar pişmanlığı ile ilişkili olabilecek kariyer kararsızlığının (Constantine ve Flores, 2006; Lipshits-Braziler ve diğerleri, 2016; Walker ve Peterson, 2012), kariyer uyumsuzluğunun (Schwatken, 2014) ve zayıf kariyer hazırlığının (Skorikov, 2007) bir ürünü olarak ifade edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda bireylerin kariyer karar pişmanlıklarının bir sonucu olarak kariyer sıkıntısı yaşayabileceği ifade edilebilir. Ayrıca kariyer sıkıntısı olumsuz duyguları içerir (Larson ve diğerleri, 1994). Bireyin kariyer kararına yönelik yaşadığı pişmanlık duygusu, güçlü ve olumsuz bir duygudur (Zeelenberg ve diğerleri, 1998). Bu durumda bireylerin kariyer karar pişmanlıklarının kariyer sıkıntılarının artmasına bir kaynak olabilir. Yukarıda paylaşılan bilgiler ışığında görüldüğü üzere bireylerin kariyer karar pişmanlıkları ve kariyer sıkıntıları yaşam doyumları üzerinde yordayıcı bir güce sahip olabilir. Dahası kariyer karar pişmanlığının yaşam doyumu üzerindeki yordayıcı etkisine kariyer sıkıntısı aracılık edebilecek niteliktedir. Dolayısıyla bu araştırmanın amacı,

üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer karar pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkide kariyer sıkıntısının aracı role sahip olup olmadığını ortaya koymaktır.

Yöntem

Araştırma Türkiye’de okuyan 321 üniversite öğrencisi ile yürütülmüştür. Katılımcıların 195’i kadın, 126’sı erkek olup, yaşları 18 ile 26 arasında değişmektedir. Araştırmada veri toplama araçları olarak Kariyer Karar Pişmanlığı Ölçeği (Erdurcan ve Kırdok, 2017), Kariyer Stresi Ölçeği (Sensoy ve Siyez, 2019) ve Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği (Koker, 1991) kullanılmıştır. Araştırmadaki değişkenler arasındaki ilişkiler Pearson korelasyon analizi analiz edilmiştir. Kariyer kararı pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkide kariyer sıkıntısının aracılık rolü ise yapısal eşitlik modeli kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular ve Tartışma

Araştırmada yapılan analizler sonucunda kariyer kararı pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumu arasında negatif bir ilişki bulunmuştur ($r = -.41, p < .001$). Kariyer kararı pişmanlığı ile kariyer sıkıntısı arasında ise pozitif bir ilişki bulunmuştur ($r = .54, p < .001$). Son olarak kariyer sıkıntısı ile yaşam doyumu arasında negatif bir ilişki bulunmuştur ($r = -.48, p < .001$). Yapısal eşitlik modelinde ulaşılan bulgulara bakıldığında ise kariyer kararı pişmanlığının kariyer sıkıntısını pozitif yönde yordadığı görülmektedir ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). Ayrıca kariyer kararı pişmanlığının yaşam tatmini üzerindeki doğrudan etkisinin anlamlı olmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Ancak kariyer kararı pişmanlığının yaşam memnuniyeti üzerindeki dolaylı etkisi anlamlıdır ($\beta = -.28, p < .001$). Yani kariyer kararı pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumu arasındaki ilişkide kariyer sıkıntısı tam aracı role sahiptir.

Bu araştırmada üniversite öğrencilerinin yaşam doyumları, kariyer karar pişmanlığı ve kariyer sıkıntısı perspektifinden incelenmiştir. Alan yazında üniversite öğrencilerinin kariyer karar pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumunun bir arada incelendiği araştırmaya rastlanmamıştır. Ancak öğretmenler ile yürütülen bir araştırmada kariyer karar pişmanlığının yaşam doyumu ile ilişkili olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır (Köse, 2019). Bu araştırmada ulaşılan sonuç bu araştırmada ulaşılan sonuç ile paralellik göstermektedir. Bireyler yaşam tercihlerine uygun kariyer seçimi yapmadıkları takdirde bu durumun olası sonuçları sonraki dönemlerde bireyin yaşamını doğrudan etkileyecektir. Uygun olmayan bir kariyer kararı sonucunda birey başarısız ve verimsiz olacaktır (Öztemel, 2012; Sarıkaya ve Khorshid, 2009). Bireylerin kendilerini başarısız ve verimsiz hissetmeleri ise yaşam doyumu üzerinde negatif bir etki oluşturmaktadır (Avşaroğlu ve diğerleri, 2005; Karaaslan ve diğerleri, 2020).

Bireylerin kariyerine yönelik yaşadığı olumsuz duygular onların kariyer sıkıntısı yaşamalarına neden olabilmektedir (Larson ve diğerleri, 1994). Bu bağlamda artan kariyer karar pişmanlığı, kariyer sıkıntısında da artışa yol açabilir. Ayrıca kariyer karar pişmanlığı bireylerin kariyerine ilişkin zorlayıcı nitelikte olan kariyer kararsızlığı (Constantine ve Flores, 2006; Lipshits-Braziler ve diğerleri, 2016; Walker ve Peterson, 2012), kariyer uyumsuzluğu (Schwatken, 2014) ve zayıf kariyer hazırlığı (Skorikov, 2007) gibi kariyer sıkıntısı ile yakından ilişkili olan durumların gelişmesine de yol açabilir. Buna bağlı olarak da artan kariyer karar pişmanlığı bireylerin kariyer sıkıntısı yaşamaları üzerinde etkili olabilir. Diğer yandan kariyer sıkıntısı bireylerin kariyerine ilişkin yaşayabileceği zorlayıcı bir durumdur (Creed ve Gagliardi, 2015). Bireyin zorlu durumlar ile karşılaşması onların yıpranmasına yol açabilir ve bu durum yaşam doyumlarında bir azalmaya neden olabilir (Dymecka ve diğerleri, 2021; Gawrych ve diğerleri, 2021; Krok ve diğerleri, 2021). Buna ek olarak bireylerin kariyer sıkıntısı yaşamaları onların psikolojik sıkıntılar yaşamalarına kaynak olmaktadır (Creed ve diğerleri, 2016). Depresyon ve stres (Sarı ve diğerleri, 2019), kaygı (Baykal, 2020) ve çaresizlik (Arslan, 2015) gibi psikolojik sıkıntılar ise bireylerin yaşam doyumları üzerinde olumsuz etkileri olan durumlardır. Görüldüğü üzere kariyer sıkıntısı kariyer karar pişmanlığından etkilenmenin yanında yaşam doyumu üzerinde de etkili olabilecek niteliktedir. Bu durum araştırmada da ulaşıldığı gibi kariyer sıkıntısının kariyer karar pişmanlığı ile yaşam doyumu arasında aracı rolde hizmet etmesine kaynak olmuştur.

Araştırmada ulaşılan sonuçlar doğrultusunda uygulayıcı ve araştırmacılara yönelik bazı önerilerde sunulmuştur. Üniversite sürecine yönelik kariyer tercihlerinin sağlıklı yapılabilmesi ilgiler, yetenekler, değerler ve beklentiler ile birlikte koşullarında değerlendirilmesini gerektirmektedir (Aydemir, 2018; Kıyak, 2006; Sarıkaya ve Khorshid, 2009). Ancak Anılan ve diğerleri (2008) öğrencilerin üniversite tercihi konusunda kendilerini yeterince bilgili görmediklerini ortaya koymuştur. Birey lise sonrası tercih yaparak bir bölüme yerleşir. İlerleyen süreçte bireyler üniversitede alınan eğitimden veya gelecek kariyer seçeneklerinden tatmin olmayabilir veya bunlar bireylerin beklentilerini karşılamayabilir. Bireyin kariyer kararına yönelik beklentilerinin karşılanmadığını hissetmesi kariyer karar pişmanlığına neden olabilir (Erdurcan ve Kırdok, 2017). Ancak birey bir eğitim süreci içerisine girmiştir, zaman, çaba ve emek harcanmıştır, diğer bir ifade ile birikmiş maliyetler söz konusudur (Blau, 2003). Buna bağlı olarak birey farklı bir bölüm ya da program seçme, yeniden eğitim alma girişiminde bulunamayabilir. Bu durumda bireylere kariyer süreçleri içerisinde alternatifler yaratması, farklı yollar araması gibi bakış açısını geliştirici çalışmalar yapılabilir.

Psikolojik danışmanlar düşük yaşam doyumuna bağlı kendilerinden danışma hizmeti alan danışanları ile çalışırken kariyer süreçlerini de oturumlarda konu edinerek kariyer karar pişmanlığı ve kariyer sıkıntısı yaşayıp yaşamadığı

konusunda bilgi alabilir. Bu konularda problemler sz konusu ise bu problemleri ařmaya ynelik danıřanları ile alıřabilir. niversite kariyer merkezleri koordinasyonunda niversite đrencilerinin kariyer karar piřmanlıđı ve kariyer sıkıntısı yařamalarını nleyici nitelikte eđitim ve alıřmalar yapılarak bireylerin yařam doyumlarını geliřtirici pozitif katkı sađlanabilir. Bireylerin kariyer karar piřmanlıklarını ve kariyer sıkıntılarını azaltmaya ynelik kariyer mdahale programları geliřtirilerek deneysel desen alıřmaları tasarlanıp bu mdahale programlarının bireylerin yařam doyumları zerindeki etkisi test edilebilir.