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Research Article

Investigating the Relationship Between Perceived Stress Levels and Life Satisfaction in Psychotherapists

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the association involving psychotherapists' perceived stress degrees and life satisfaction. The research was conducted with a sample of 51 psychotherapists, 33 female and 18 male, aged between 27 and 50. Data were collected through the “Socio-Demographic Information Form,” “Adult Life Satisfaction Scale,” and “Perceived Stress Scale.” The results show that psychotherapists have high levels of life satisfaction and moderate levels of perceived stress. Comparative analyses indicated that married psychotherapists had significantly lower stress levels than single participants. Psychotherapists with middle-to-high income levels reported significantly lower perceived stress compared to those with low-to-middle income levels. No significant differences were found in life satisfaction or perceived stress based on public versus private employment status. A significant, moderate, and negative correlation was identified between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Regression analysis demonstrated that perceived stress significantly predicted life satisfaction. This study contributes to understanding factors affecting the psychological well-being of mental health professionals and provides a foundation for future research in this field.

Keywords: Psychotherapist, stress, life satisfaction

Psikoterapistlerde Algılanan Stres Seviyesi ile Yaşam Doyumu Arasındaki İlişkinin İncelenmesi

Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, psikoterapistlerin algılanan stres düzeyleri ile yaşam doyumları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Araştırma, 27-50 yaş aralığında bulunan ve 18 erkek, 33 kadın olmak üzere toplamda 51 psikoterapistten oluşan bir örneklem ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler, “Sosyo-Demografik Bilgi Formu”, “Yetişkin Yaşam Doyumu Ölçeği” ve “Algılanan Stres Ölçeği” aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar,

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psikoterapistlerin yüksek düzeyde yaşam memnuniyetine ve orta düzeyde algılanan strese sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Karşılaştırmalı analizler, evli psikoterapistlerin bekar katılımcılara göre anlamlı derecede daha düşük stres düzeylerine sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Orta ve yüksek gelir düzeyine sahip psikoterapistler, düşük ve orta gelir düzeyine sahip olanlara kıyasla anlamlı derecede daha düşük algılanan stres bildirmiştir. Kamu ve özel sektörde çalışma durumuna bağlı olarak yaşam memnuniyeti veya algılanan streste anlamlı bir fark bulunmamıştır. Algılanan stres ile yaşam memnuniyeti arasında anlamlı, orta düzeyde ve negatif bir korelasyon tespit edilmiştir. Regresyon analizi, algılanan stresin yaşam memnuniyetini anlamlı şekilde tahmin ettiğini göstermiştir. Bu çalışma, ruh sağlığı uzmanlarının psikolojik iyi oluşlarını etkileyen faktörlerin anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve bu alandaki gelecekteki araştırmalar için bir temel oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Psikoterapist, stres, yaşam doyumu

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychotherapy is defined as a process in which the therapist makes the incompatible emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals more harmonious by using scientific psychological methods and approaches [1]. This process involves a process in which the psychotherapist interacts with the client, and both parties experience intellectual and emotional intensity. However, intensive therapeutic work not only does not provide spiritual satisfaction for psychotherapists but can also create great stress and emotional fatigue [2].

Stress is the process of responding to events that hinder communication between individuals, reduce life satisfaction, and challenge individuals [3], whereas perceived stress refers to the totality of evaluations of how difficult an individual finds life's challenges [4]. Being under the influence of stress for an extended period negatively impacts individuals' daily interactions, leading to a decrease in their quality of life. Individuals may experience physical, mental, social, and emotional problems, which can lead to health problems [5].

Life satisfaction, which is linked to numerous satisfaction domains of satisfaction, is considered a primary goal in enhancing quality of life. It represents the cognitive component of subjective well-being and has been defined as an individual's overall evaluation of their life. It is the cognitive component of subjective well-being and has been described as a person's total evaluation of their life. It consists of the following dimensions: enjoying daily activities, making sense of life, feeling successful in achieving basic life goals, high self-esteem, optimism, and general happiness [6]. People evaluate their life satisfaction based on their social environment, family relationships, work lives, and general life experiences [7].

Psychotherapists are among the professions exposed to high levels of stress due to the nature of their work. Therefore, their cognitive and psychological quality of life is directly influenced by profession-related stressors, which may negatively affect their level of life satisfaction [8]. In addition to experiencing high stress levels, psychotherapists are frequently confronted with their clients' traumatic experiences. Such exposure may lead to secondary traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion, and prolonged empathic strain. These professional demands make psychotherapists particularly vulnerable to reduced life satisfaction compared to other occupational groups. Given the increasing global demand for mental health services and the growing workload of psychotherapists, examining the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction in this population has become both timely and necessary. Accordingly, the present study examines the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among psychotherapists. The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

H_0 = There is no significant relationship between psychotherapists' perceived stress level and life satisfaction.

H_1 = There is a negative significant relationship between psychotherapists' perceived stress level and life satisfaction.

2. AIM OF THE STUDY

This study's objective was to examine the connection between the level of stress perceived by psychotherapists and their life satisfaction. The following questions were answered within the framework of this general purpose:

- 1- What is the level of stress perceived by psychotherapists?
- 2- What is the level of life satisfaction of psychotherapists?
- 3- Do the levels of stress perceived by psychotherapists and their levels of life satisfaction differ significantly according to sociodemographic variables?
- 4- Is there a significant relationship between the level of stress perceived by psychotherapists and their levels of life satisfaction?

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants

This research was conducted in the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. A simple random sampling method was employed. Based on a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 11%, the required sample size was calculated as 57 participants for an unknown population. In forming the study sample, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established as follows:

The inclusion criteria were as follows: being between 27 and 50 years of age, holding a bachelor's degree from a relevant mental health discipline, currently working in a public or private mental health institution, and providing voluntary informed consent to participate in the study.

The exclusion criteria were as follow: not meeting the specified age range, not holding a bachelor's degree in a mental health field, not currently working in a public or private mental health institution, declining or withdrawing consent to participate, submitting incomplete data, or providing responses that could compromise the validity of the study.

Ultimately, based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria and the predetermined sample size, 51 psychotherapists aged between 27 and 50 were included in the study. Of these, 18 (35.3%) were male and 33 (64.7%) were female, while 19 (37.3%) were married and 32 (62.7%) were single. 26 (51.0%) held a master's degree and 25 (49.0%) held a bachelor's degree. Sixteen participants (31.4%) reported a low-to-middle monthly income, whereas 35 participants (68.6%) reported a middle-to-high monthly income. Regarding professional experience, 34 participants (66.7%) had 0–5 years of experience, while 17 participants (33.3%) had 6–10 years of experience. 32 (62.7%) work in private institutions, while 19 (37.3%) work in public institutions. In terms of weekly working hours, 23 participants (45.1%) reported working 30 hours or more per week, whereas 28 participants (54.9%) reported working fewer than 30 hours per week. Finally, 35 participants (68.6%) reported feeling competent in coping with stress, while 16 participants (31.4%) reported feeling insufficient in this regard.

3.2 Model of the Research

This research was conducted within the framework of quantitative research methodology using a screening model, which aims to describe an existing or past situation as it is [9]. Among screening models, the relational screening model was preferred, as it focuses on examining relationships between variables. The two main variables of the study were perceived stress level and life satisfaction level, and no variables were defined as dependent or independent.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using three instruments: The "*Socio-Demographic Information Form*," The "*Adult Life Satisfaction Scale*," and The "*Perceived Stress Scale*." All data collection tools were

administered online via Google Forms and distributed through platforms such as professional e-mail lists and WhatsApp groups.

The Socio-Demographic Information Form: The Socio-Demographic Information Form was developed by the researchers and consisted of nine closed-ended questions designed to obtain information regarding participants' age, gender, marital status, education level, income level, professional experience, work setting, weekly working hours, and perceived competence in coping with stress.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a self-report instrument developed by Cohen et al. [10] to assess the degree to which individuals perceive situations in their lives as stressful. The Turkish adaptation and validity and reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Eskin [11]. PSS aims to measure individuals' subjective evaluations of their ability to cope with stressors. The scale focuses on the extent to which individuals perceive the events in their lives to be unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. The 14-item version of the scale uses a five-point Likert-type response format, and higher scores indicate higher perceived stress levels (0 = never, 5 = very often). The total score is calculated by reverse scoring 7 items, numbered 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13, on the scale. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 0, and the highest score is 56. The total score obtained reflects the stress level perceived by the individual; higher scores indicate higher perceived stress, and lower scores indicate lower perceived stress. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the PSS was found to be $\alpha = 0.89$.

Adult Life Satisfaction Scale (ALSS): The Adult Life Satisfaction Scale (ALSS) was developed by Kaba et al. [12] to measure individuals' overall life satisfaction. ALSS consists of a total of 25 items and is scored using a 5-point Likert-type rating system (1 = Not satisfied at all, 5 = Completely satisfied). Only item number 6 in the scale is reverse coded to calculate the total score. Each item evaluates the individual's level of satisfaction with a specific area of their life. The scale consists of 25 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting greater life satisfaction. High scores indicate that the individual's satisfaction with their life is high; low scores indicate that life satisfaction is low. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the ALSS was calculated as $\alpha = 0.90$.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 22. Prior to statistical analyses, the normality of the data distribution was examined using skewness and kurtosis values. According to Tabachnick and Fidell [13], values within the ± 1.50 range indicate a normal distribution. As the skewness and kurtosis values of the scales fell within this range, parametric statistical analyses were conducted. Statistical significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, and $p < 0.001$.

3.5 Ethics of the Study

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the İstanbul 29 Mayıs University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee on 03.03.2025 (Reference No: 2025/03). Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study prior to data collection, and participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained electronically through Google Forms.

4. RESULTS

In this section, the results of descriptive analyses, comparative analyses, correlation analyses, and regression analyses are presented.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the “Adult Life Satisfaction Scale (ALSS)” and the “Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)” scales are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Scales	Min	Max	\bar{X}	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
ALSS	54.00	103.00	79.00	12.01	-.276	-.462
PSS	18.00	57.00	39.41	8.82	-.200	.687

ALSS=Adult Life Satisfaction Scale, PSS=Perceived Stress Scale

As shown in Table 1, psychotherapists reported a medium-to-high level of life satisfaction ($M = 79.00$, $SD = 12.01$) and a moderate level of perceived stress ($M = 39.41$, $SD = 8.82$).

4.2 Comparative Analysis

Independent samples t-test analyses were conducted to examine whether life satisfaction and perceived stress levels differed according to marital status, income level, professional experience, and perceived stress coping competence. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. T-test results

Variable	Labels	ALSS		$t(49)$	PSS		$t(49)$
		\bar{X}	Sd		\bar{X}	Sd	
Marital status	married	82.94	12.75	-1.85	35.94	9.05	2.24*
	single	76.65	11.10		41.46	8.14	
Income	low and middle	75.00	10.88	-1.63	44.81	8.13	3.21**
	middle and high	80.82	12.21		36.94	8.08	
Experience	0-5 years	76.55	11.11	-2.12*	41.38	7.63	2.35*
	5+ years	83.88	12.59		35.47	9.92	
Stress coping	Sufficient	81.34	11.47	2.13*	36.20	7.66	-4.53***
	Insufficient	73.87	11.93		46.43	7.06	

*ALSS=Adult Life Satisfaction Scale, PSS=Perceived Stress Scale, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$*

No significant difference was found in the life satisfaction levels of psychotherapists according to marital status and income level, accordingly $t(49) = -1.85$, $p > 0.05$; $t(49) = -1.63$, $p > 0.05$. However, a significant difference was found in the life satisfaction levels according to professional experience and stress coping skills, accordingly $t(49) = -2.12$, $p < 0.05$; $t(49) = 2.13$, $p < 0.05$. The life satisfaction of psychotherapists with more than 5 years of professional experience (83.88 ± 12.59) is significantly higher than those with 0-5 years of experience (76.55 ± 11.11). Likewise, life satisfaction of those with high coping skills (81.34 ± 11.47) was significantly higher than those with inadequate coping strategies (73.87 ± 11.93). Single participants, those with low-to-middle income levels, individuals with fewer years of professional experience, and those reporting insufficient stress coping competence exhibited significantly higher perceived stress levels.

The perceived stress level of psychotherapists differed significantly according to marital status, income level, professional experience, and competence in coping with stress, accordingly $t(49) = 2.24$, $p < 0.05$; $t(49) = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$; $t(49) = 2.35$, $p < 0.05$; $t(49) = -4.53$, $p < 0.001$. The stress level of singles (41.46 ± 8.14) was higher than married individuals (35.94 ± 9.05); the stress level of low- and middle-income groups (44.81 ± 8.13) was higher than high-income groups (36.94 ± 8.08); the stress level of psychotherapists with 0-5 years of experience (41.38 ± 7.63) was higher than those with 5+ years of experience (35.47 ± 9.92); and the stress level of those who had adequate stress

coping strategies was found to be lower (36.20 ± 7.66) than those who had inadequate stress coping strategies (46.43 ± 7.06).

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. The results revealed a statistically significant, moderate, and negative correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction ($r = -0.618$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that as perceived stress levels increase, life satisfaction levels decrease among psychotherapists.

Table 3. Pearson correlation analysis results

	ALSS	PSS
ALSS ^a	-	-0.618**
PSS ^b	-0.618**	-

^a= Adult Life Satisfaction Scale, ^b=Perceived Stress Scale, ** $p < 0.01$, $N^a = 51$, $N^b = 51$

Given that the correlation results revealed a moderate association, regression analysis was performed to assess the magnitude of this effect.

4.4 Regression Analysis

The effect level of two variables with a significant and moderate correlational relationship between them was examined through regression analysis. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether perceived stress significantly predicted life satisfaction. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Simple linear regression analysis results

Variable	B	St error	β	t	F	p
Perceived Stress Scale	-0.842	0.153	-0.618	-5.503	30.28	0.000***

$R^2 = 0.38$

$N = 51$, Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction, *** $p < 0.001$

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether perceived stress significantly predicted life satisfaction. The analysis demonstrated that perceived stress was a significant predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.618$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived stress accounted for approximately 38% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.38$).

5. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between psychotherapists' perceived stress levels and their life satisfaction. The results showed that there was a statistically significant, moderate, negative correlational relationship between the perceived stress and life satisfaction. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 (H_1) was supported. Considering the literature related to the hypothesis, Hui et al.'s study [14] conducted with 242 medical students found that increased perceived stress levels were associated with decreased life satisfaction. In this regard, the findings of the study support the literature.

When the findings related to **marital status** were examined, single psychotherapists were found to have significantly higher perceived stress levels than married psychotherapists. This result

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supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of social support in coping with stress [15]. Cooper et al. [16] reported that peer support may improve clinical outcomes, self-efficacy, and recovery. Similarly, other studies have indicated that social support enables individuals to evaluate stressful situations more effectively and manage stress more successfully [17]. In this context, spousal support may act as a protective factor by reducing perceived stress levels among married psychotherapists. Furthermore, the impact of marital satisfaction on life satisfaction and stress levels can be said to be critical [18]. In line with the literature indicating that peer and social support serve as protective factors against stress, the lower stress levels observed among married participants in this study may be attributed to spousal support. Thus, individuals receiving support from their spouses appear to experience reduced levels of stress.

The findings also revealed that psychotherapists with low-to-middle income levels reported significantly higher perceived stress levels compared to those with middle-to-high income levels. Previous research has shown that higher income levels are often associated with increased life satisfaction and reduced stress [19]. Furthermore, another study found that students who perceived their socioeconomic status as low had lower life satisfaction levels than students who perceived their socioeconomic status as high [20]. The present findings are consistent with the literature and suggest that financial security may play an important role in stress perception among psychotherapists.

Furthermore, professional experience was found to be positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively associated with perceived stress. Psychotherapists with more years of professional experience reported higher life satisfaction and lower stress levels. These findings are in line with previous studies indicating that professional experience contributes to the development of effective coping strategies and psychological resilience [21]. The research findings support the literature on this topic.

The study also demonstrated that psychotherapists who perceived themselves as competent in coping with stress reported higher life satisfaction and lower perceived stress levels. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that psychological resilience and coping competence are significant predictors of perceived stress among psychotherapists [22]. Therefore, enhancing stress coping skills may be a key factor in improving psychotherapists' psychological well-being.

Finally, no significant differences were found in perceived stress or life satisfaction based on public or private sector employment status. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting no sector-based differences in stress and life satisfaction levels among employees [23,24]. In this respect, the study supports the literature.

5.1 Limitations

This has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the results. Second, the unequal gender distribution, with a lower number of male participants, represents another limitation. Additionally, the use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias, as participants may have overreported or underreported their experiences. Finally, the absence of qualitative data limits the depth of interpretation of the findings, as participants' subjective experiences could not be explored in detail.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the importance of examining psychotherapists' perceived stress levels and life satisfaction. First, mental health issues are becoming more commonplace worldwide. Given the increasing global demand for mental health services, psychotherapists face heightened workloads and emotional demands. The findings indicate that higher perceived stress is associated

with lower life satisfaction among psychotherapists. Accordingly, addressing stress-related factors is essential for promoting both individual well-being and professional sustainability. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be proposed. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of results. In addition, qualitative research methods may provide deeper insights into the sources of stress experienced by psychotherapists. Furthermore, the development and dissemination of training programs aimed at strengthening stress coping skills, as well as the improvement of supervision and mentoring systems, may contribute to enhanced psychological well-being among psychotherapists.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The researchers declare that there is no personal or institutional conflict of interest within the scope of this study.

Ethics Committee Adoption

The ethical appropriateness of the research was accepted by the decision of the İstanbul 29 Mayıs University Ethics Committee dated 03.03.2025 and numbered 2025/03-7.

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