

The Mediating Role of Resilience in the Relationship between Life Goals and Hopelessness: Turkey Sample

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This study aimed to explore the mediating role of university students' resilience in the relationship between their life goals and hopelessness. The participants of the study consisted of a total of 455 students (252 females [55.4%], 203 males [44.6%]) from universities in six different cities in Turkey. The Scale of Setting Life Goals with Respect to Positive Psychotherapy (Eryılmaz, 2012), the Resilience Scale (Gürkan, 2006), and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974) were used as data collection tools. The data were analyzed using correlation analysis and structural equation modeling methods. The correlation analysis revealed, that hopelessness was negatively correlated with both life goals and resilience. Also, the mediation analysis put forth that resilience had a full mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness. Raising life goals and resilience of university students will help decrease their hopelessness.

Key words: life goals, resilience, hopelessness

Introduction

Being pessimistic about the future is a tendency most commonly observed in young adults. Local studies have revealed that young people's pessimism about the future is associated with hopelessness (Ergüt, 2020; Özmen et al., 2008). Having adaptive life goals promotes hope for the future, so goal-setting could help reduce

hopelessness (Cenkseven-Önder & Mukba, 2017; Korkmaz & Cenkseven-Önder, 2019). We consider resilience as another important variable related to hopelessness: resilience is positively associated with hope (İşcan & Malkoç, 2017) and life goals (Şahin, 2018), moreover goal-related life satisfaction was revealed as negatively related to hopelessness and positively related to psychological resilience (Çelik et al., 2017).

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International studies revealed that hopelessness in young people is related to lower future motivation (Madani et al., 2018). Studies also showed that hopelessness, experienced especially in young adulthood, is associated with depression and risk for suicide (Lane & Miranda, 2017; Liu et al., 2020). Young adulthood is a period when life goals that are related to career, relationship, and entertainment come to the fore (Nair, 2003). In this period, individuals begin to set their life goals that will contribute to their future happiness (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Setting goals and following them is one of the most effective factors in individuals' adaptation to life (Myers & Deiner, 1995). However, individuals may face many challenges while pursuing these goals. Being able to cope with and adapt to these difficulties is associated with young individuals' resilience (Aburn et al., 2016).

In our study, we aim to explore the mediating role of resilience between life goals and hopelessness of young adults. We believe that the results of the study will contribute to the psychological health of young people by filling the gaps in the practice and research of hopelessness prevention.

Hopelessness

Hopelessness is a state that encompasses negative feelings, cognitions, and motivations about the future (Chang, 2017) and is related to the need to be comforted or feeling emotional pain (Alidina & Tettero, 2010). In addition, individuals' encounters with obstacles may lead to hopelessness (Snyder et al., 2002). Internal conversations, such as "I can't do this" or "I give up", also trigger individuals' hopelessness (Chang, 2017). Furthermore, hopelessness is affected by the actions of other people with whom individuals have a relationship (Alidina & Tettero, 2010), for

example, individuals who are not getting social support are more hopeless (Buursma et al., 2020; Pehlivan et al., 2012). Loss, death, and traumatic events, also, trigger individuals' hopelessness (Alidina & Tettero, 2010). While hope is an effective factor in the life satisfaction of individuals (Halama, 2010), hopelessness is characterized by low life energy, maladaptive cognitive evaluative processes (Huen et al., 2015; Niranjjan et al., 2018; Yang & Clum, 1994), and depressive symptoms (Bayrami et al., 2012).

Life Goals

One of the ties that bind individuals to life is life goals (Korkmaz & Cenkseven-Önder, 2019). Life goals are situations that are desired to be achieved with cognitive and behavioral strategies (Emmons, 1999). Including different living spaces and constructs, life goals vary from person to person (Visconti et al., 2015). In the context of positive psychotherapy, life goals are one of the sources (Eryilmaz, 2012; Peseschkian, 1980) that have the greatest impact on the formation of a healthy balance (Peseschkian & Walker, 1987). When the life goals that stand out during young adulthood are examined, goals related to education, career/achievement, relationship, and entertainment come to the fore (Nair, 2003). Career goals include having a job and getting education, whereas relationship goals involve determining the characteristics of the person to get married to and planning how many children to have, and entertainment goals involve planning future sports activities and hobbies (Eryilmaz, 2010). Life goals are closely related to significant life states, such as self-acceptance, life satisfaction (Olčar et al., 2019), psychological well-being (Cenkseven-Önder & Mukba, 2017), pleasant life (Brdar et al., 2009), and meaningful life (Brdar et al., 2009).

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt to difficulties and to continue life without losing psychological strength in the face of difficult life events (Aburn et al., 2016; Garmezy & Masten, 1986). Individuals with high resilience exhibit stamina effort against troubles with their strong characteristics (Herrman et al., 2011). In other words, resilience is the ability of individuals to survive despite difficulties (Masten & Reed, 2002). Resilience is also related to individuals' ability to distance themselves from negativity (Linguanti, 1992). Individuals' strength, entrepreneurship, optimism, relationship styles, foresight, purposefulness, leadership, and inquisitiveness are factors related to their resilience (Gürgan, 2006). Studies revealed that resilience is closely correlated with important factors, such as positive emotions and cognitive flexibility (Aydın-Sünbül, 2020), depression (Poole et al., 2017), life satisfaction (Kong et al., 2015), psychological well-being (Richardson & Chew-Graham, 2016), and meaning in life (Du et al., 2017).

The Relationship between Hopelessness, Life Goals, and Resilience

Life goals are one of the basic components of hope (Snyder, 2000). This forms a strong relationship between life goals and hopelessness, which express motivation sources for future experiences (Hadley & MacLeod, 2010). Besides, overcoming obstacles in order to reach the goals that individuals set decreases hopelessness (Snyder et al., 2002). It can be said that the life goals of young individuals may be a predictor of their hopelessness. There are studies suggesting that there is a relationship between hopelessness and life satisfaction (Çapri et al., 2013), motivation for playing video games (Ögren,

2020), and watching entertainment programs (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005), which are related to entertainment life goals. The desire for a career (Dudovitz et al., 2017) and unrealistic career goals (Shardlow & Madsen, 2017), which are related to career-life goals, are associated with hopelessness, too. Similarly, studies put forth that relationship life goals are also related to the individuals' hopelessness for the future (Abela & Seligman, 2000; Miller et al., 2014).

Life goals are significantly related to resilience (Hadley & MacLeod, 2010; Nygren et al., 2005). When people try to realize a goal, they put an effort proportional to the goals they are trying to achieve (Locke, 2002). According to Emmons (1999), one of the most important effects of life goals on individuals is to increase their personal struggle power. Moreover, the nature of resilience includes fighting for the sake of achieving a goal (Gürgan, 2006). The fact that individuals have life goals and put an effort into achieving those goals activates their resilience. Indeed, Li et al. (2017) stated that goals such as having a plan, having a good career in the future and going to a good university activate the elements of resilience.

Resilience is also closely associated with individuals' hopelessness (Han-Mo et al., 2014; Hjemdal et al., 2011). Some studies showed that resilience predicts hopelessness (Collazoni et al., 2020; Hjemdal et al., 2011). Hopelessness is experienced due to the lack of coping mechanisms in the face of difficult life events (Farran et al., 1995). Resilience is individuals' most important strength in coping with difficult life experiences (Newman, 2005). Individuals with high resilience display a positive attitude in the face of challenging situations (Ray-Bennet et al., 2010), while individuals with low resilience show vulnerability and experience hopelessness for the future (Hjemdal et al., 2011).

The Present Study

Hopelessness has recently become a common state among young people (Gulec-Oyekcin et al., 2017; Shanahan et al., 2020). Hopelessness is associated with many physical and mental health problems in young individuals (Lew et al., 2019; Eslami et al., 2017). So, to prevent hopelessness in young individuals, it is of great importance to illuminate the variables associated with it. Because the relationship between life goals, resilience and young people's hopelessness has, to our knowledge, never been addressed together before, the present study aimed to be a guide on hopelessness in psychological counseling services offered to young people. The present study also aimed to examine the mediating role of Turkish university students' resilience in the relationship between their life goals and hopelessness. To that end, the hypothetical model of the study is presented in Figure 1. In the present study, the following hypotheses (Hs) were examined:

H₁: Life goals will negatively predict hopelessness.

H₂: Life goals will positively predict resilience.

H₃: Resilience will negatively predict hopelessness.

H₄: Resilience has a mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness.

Method

Participants

The study sample was selected using the "convenience sampling" method, one of the purposive sampling methods. Exclusion and inclusion criteria were determined as participants being university students between the ages 18 and 25 at the time of the study. Individuals who were not university students and were not in this age range were excluded. The study group included a total of 455 students (252 females [55.4%], 203 males [44.6%]) from universities in six different cities in Turkey. The students' age range varied between 18 and 25 (*Mean age* = 20.98 years, *SD* = 1.70). Since the participants were staying home due to the COVID-19 pandemic (university education in Turkey was carried out through distance learning during the pandemic), they participated in the study via online networks.

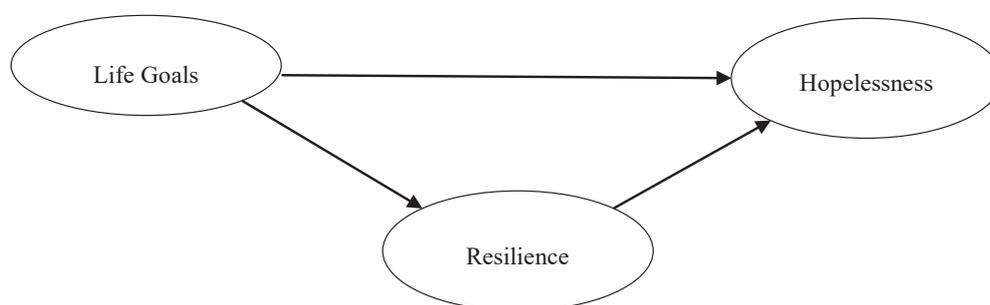


Figure 1 The hypothesized structural model.

Data Collection Tools

The Scale of Setting Life Goals with Respect to Positive Psychotherapy

Developed by Eryilmaz (2012), the Scale of Setting Life Goals with Respect to Positive Psychotherapy measures whether or not university students set life goals. The scale consists of three dimensions: career (achievement) goals, relationship goals, and entertainment (body-sense) goals. High scores indicate individuals having goals in the related dimension. The nine-item scale has a four-point Likert-type evaluation structure with responses ranging between “*strongly disagree*” (1) and “*totally agree*” (4) (e.g., “*I have always had a work plan in my life*”). In the original study, the internal consistency coefficients, tested with Cronbach’s alpha, were .80 for the whole scale, .85 for the career goals dimension, .72 for the relationship goals dimension and .72 for the entertainment goals dimension (Eryilmaz, 2012). In this study, the internal consistency coefficients were found as .85 for the career goals dimension, .76 for the relationship goals dimension, and .70 for the entertainment goals dimension.

The Resilience Scale

Developed by Grگان (2006), the Resilience Scale determines university students’ resilience levels. The scale has eight dimensions: personal power, initiative, positive outlook, relationships, foresighted, purpose in life, leadership, and investigative. High scores on this scale indicate high resilience. The 50-item scale has a five-point Likert-type evaluation system with responses ranging between “*Not describing at all*” (1) and “*strongly describing*” (5) (e.g., “*In the face of difficulties, I fight them patiently without*

giving up”). In the original study, the internal consistency coefficients, tested with Cronbach’s alpha, were .80 for the whole scale, .89 for the personal power dimension, .82 for the initiative dimension, .80 for the positive outlook dimension, .77 for the relationships dimension, .75 for the foresighted dimension, .72 for the purpose in life dimension, .68 for the leadership dimension, and .66 for the investigative dimension (Grگان, 2006). In this study, the internal consistency coefficients were found as .92 for the personal power dimension, .73 for the initiative dimension, .77 for the positive outlook dimension, .77 for the relationships dimension, .71 for the foresighted dimension, .76 for the purpose in life dimension, .69 for the leadership dimension, and .65 for the investigative dimension.

The Beck Hopelessness Scale

Developed by Beck et al. (1974), The Beck Hopelessness Scale determines individuals’ hopelessness for the future. The scale’s Turkish adaptation was conducted by Durak & Palabıyıkoglu (1994). High scores indicate high hopelessness. The scale consists of three dimensions, namely loss of motivation, feelings and expectations about the future, and hope. The scale has 20 “*yes/no*” type questions (e.g., “*My future seems dark to me*”). In the Turkish adaptation study, the internal consistency coefficients, tested with Cronbach’s alpha, were .85 for the whole scale, .72 for the loss of motivation dimension, .78 for the feelings and expectations about the future dimension, and .72 for the hope dimension. In this study, the internal consistency coefficients were found as .71 for the loss of motivation dimension, .82 for the feelings and expectations about the future dimension, and .71 for the hope dimension.

Procedures and Ethics

During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic the education in Turkey was conducted online. Thus, the students were staying home. Therefore, the study data were collected using "Google Forms" in January 2021. All of the participants gave their written informed consent. No personally identifiable information was requested during data collection. The study was performed in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved and registered by the Ethics and Research Committee of Çukurova University (E-74009925-604.01.02-40427).

Data Analysis

Before the analyses, normal distribution assumptions were verified, and the data distribution was found to be normal. Pearson correlation coefficient was performed to examine the relationships between life goals, resilience, and hopelessness. A structural equation model using full information maximum likelihood estimation was conducted to assess the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness. As Figure 2 shows, in the hypothetical model, life goals were considered to be an endogenous latent variable while resilience was considered as the latent variable acting as a mediator, and hopelessness was the latent and dependent

variable. The goodness of fit indices that were used were χ^2/df , Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). In order to determine whether the model fitted the data, $\chi^2/df < 5$, CFI $> .90$, TLI $> .90$, GFI $> .90$, and RMSEA $< .10$ were used (Kline, 2005; Marcoulides & Schumacher, 2001; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Bootstrapping tests were performed to examine whether resilience mediated the relationship between life goals and hopelessness (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). In the Bootstrap analysis, 10,000 resampling and 95% confidence interval were used. IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 (IBM Corp., 2017) and AMOS Graphics 24 (Arbuckle, 2016) software packages were employed for data analysis.

Findings

Findings Regarding the Correlation Analysis Between the Variables

Table 1 presents the correlation values between participants' life goals, resilience, and hopelessness scores.

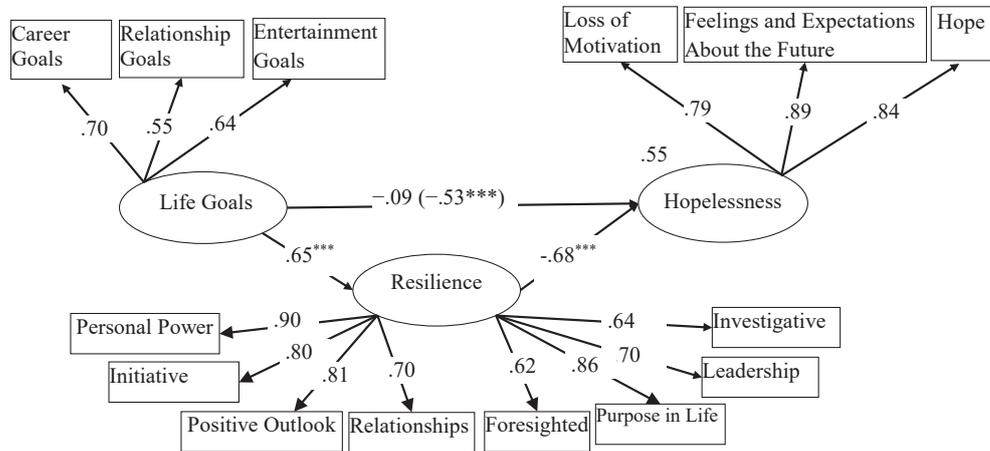
As seen in Table 1, hopelessness was negatively correlated with life goals ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$) and resilience ($r = -.66$, $p < .01$). High scores in hopelessness are associated with low scores in life purpose and resilience. Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was determined between life goals and resil-

Table 1 *The correlation coefficient between the life goals, resilience, and hopelessness*

| | <i>M ± SD</i> | Cronbach's α | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------|--------|--------|---|
| 1-Life Goals | 24.63±4.94 | .82 | — | | |
| 2-Resilience | 180.92±32.90 | .95 | .49** | — | |
| 3-Hopelessness | 5.58±4.74 | .88 | -.41** | -.66** | — |

Note. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation.

** $p < .01$



Note. The ones in the ellipse are the latent variables, the ones in the rectangle are the sub-dimensions of the latent variables and act as the observed variable. The coefficients between the latent variables and the coefficients between each latent variable and the observed variables associated with them are standardized coefficients. The coefficient expressed in parentheses is the coefficient between life goals and hopelessness before resilience was included in the model. *** $p < .001$

Figure 2 Mediation model of the relationship between the study variables.

ience ($r = .49, p < .01$). In other words, high scores in life goals are associated with high scores in resilience.

Findings Regarding the Study Model

The model regarding the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness was tested. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

First of all, the path coefficient between life goals and hopelessness was tested with a model in which resilience was not a mediator. The goodness of fit values of this model were examined and found to be within an acceptable range [$\chi^2 (8, N = 455) = 28.471; p < .001; \chi^2/df = 3.56; TLI = .96; CFI = .98; GFI = .98; RMSEA = .07$]. The path coefficient between life goals and hopelessness was found to be

statistically significant ($\beta = -.53, p < .001$). Then, the goodness of fit values of the model in which resilience played a mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness were examined. It was found that the goodness of fit values of this model were also within an acceptable range [$\chi^2 (69, N = 455) = 297.114; p < .001; \chi^2/df = 4.30; TLI = .92; CFI = .94; GFI = .91; RMSEA = .08$]. The path coefficients of life goals and resilience ($\beta = .65, p < .001$), and resilience and hopelessness ($\beta = -.68, p < .001$) were statistically significant. However, with the inclusion of resilience in the model, the path coefficient between life goals and hopelessness was not significant ($\beta = -.09, p = .17$). Life goals and resilience explained 55% of the variance in hopelessness.

In order to determine whether resilience had a mediating role in the relationship be-

Table 2 Bootstrapping test of the mediating effect of life goals on hopelessness

| Pathways | β | Standard Error | 95% CI | p |
|--|---------|----------------|--------------|------|
| <i>Direct effect</i> | | | | |
| Life Goals → Resilience | .65*** | .05 | .56 to .74 | .000 |
| Life Goals → Hopelessness | -.09 | .06 | -.23 to .04 | .172 |
| Resilience → Hopelessness | -.68*** | .06 | -.79 to -.56 | .000 |
| <i>Indirect effect</i> | | | | |
| Life Goals → Resilience → Hopelessness | -.44*** | .04 | -.54 to -.36 | .000 |
| <i>Total effect</i> | | | | |
| Life Goals → Hopelessness | -.53*** | .05 | -.63 to -.43 | .000 |

Note. CI: Confidence interval. Standardized beta coefficients (β) were reported.

*** $p < .001$

tween life goals and hopelessness, bootstrapping analysis was conducted. While performing bootstrapping analysis, 95% confidence interval and 10,000 resampling paths were conducted. Results are presented in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, the lower and upper values of the confidence interval in all path coefficients (except for life goals and hopelessness) did not cover zero. That is, the indirect effect of life goals on hopelessness through the mediation of resilience was found to be significant ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .001$, CI [-.54, -.36]). However, the path coefficient between life goals and hopelessness was not significant. Therefore, resilience had a full mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness.

Discussion

In this study, the relationship between university students' life goals, resilience, and hopelessness was examined with structural equation modeling. It was concluded that the life goals and resilience of young people had a significant effect on their hopelessness. In addition, resilience was found to play a mediating role in the relationship between hopelessness and life goals. Each finding regarding the

study hypotheses is presented and discussed in detail below.

When H_1 was tested, one of the main conclusions reached in the study was that life goals had a negative effect on hopelessness. Similarly, in line with the results of the present study, some studies revealed that maladaptive life goals can lead to hopelessness (Lynmarie-Shanahan, 2018) and that life goals are a positive predictor of hope (Long et al., 2020). Studies have also found a negative correlation between life goals and hopelessness (Butt et al., 2020; García-Alandete et al., 2009). One of the basic elements of Beck's cognitive triad for depression is negative thoughts about the future (Beck, 1967), more specifically, as a depression-centered element, individuals may become hopeless about the future (Beck et al., 1985). Thus, depression is the central focus of a theoretical approach to hopelessness for the future (Abramson et al., 1989). In addition, Haefel et al. (2008) stated that individuals with depressive symptoms and cognitive malaise have a tendency to make negative inferences about the future and that their hopelessness may increase. Furthermore, previous studies (Nkyi & Ninnoni, 2020; Wang et al., 2007) put forth that life goals negatively predict depression and Greene (1989)

stated that depression is related to negative thinking about the future and in this context, depression is closely related to hopelessness. In summary, this study result may be related to depression, which is negatively associated with life goals and positively associated with hopelessness.

According to H_2 , another study result was that life goals had a positive effect on resilience. There are studies in the literature that revealed positive relationships between life goals and resilience (Alsadi & Drabie, 2020). These studies found that career goals (Santilli et al., 2020) and relationship goals (Szwedo et al., 2017), which are components of life goals, are predictors of resilience. According to previous researchers, resilience is a personality trait related to the ability to recover from life experiences that have gone wrong (Nygren et al., 2005). Life goals refers to the motivational tools that individuals have for obtaining and maintaining desired situations or avoiding undesired situations (Nair, 2003). Considering that life goals affect individuals' motivation to participate in recovery processes (Nair, 2003) and resilience is a personality trait related to an individual's recovery skills, it can be said that resilience is a feature that includes life goals (Smith et al., 2009). In this context, the present study found that life goals are a predictor of resilience, and this can be understood by the fact that life goals are a factor of resilience (Smith et al., 2009).

When H_3 was tested, it was found that resilience had a negative effect on hopelessness. Hopelessness refers to the individual's submission and loss of faith in the future as a result of the failures experienced in the face of life events (Farran et al., 1995). On the contrary, resilience is a status that helps individuals cope with difficult life events and adapt to living with difficulties despite failures (Aburn et al., 2016). Therefore, being a fighter and adapting to living with difficulties, which de-

velops due to resilience, can prevent the formation of hopelessness. As a matter of fact, studies showed that resilience is a predictor of hopelessness (Hjemdal et al., 2011) and that individuals with high resilience have lower hopelessness levels (Han-Mo et al., 2014).

In addition, according to H_4 , resilience was examined as it has a mediating role in the study. One of the most important conclusions reached in this study was that resilience played a mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness. This result shows that along with university students' life goals their resilience increases and they experience less hopelessness. Similarly, Mahdian and Ghaffari (2016) previously concluded in their study that resilience plays a mediating role in the relationship between spiritual well-being and hope. Spiritual well-being refers to the resources of religious life goals and motivation towards life goals (Emmons et al., 1998).

Grant et al. (2009) found that individuals' resilience levels increase depending on their life goals and similarly, their psychological well-being levels increase in relation to these variables, i.e., resilience and life goals. Resilience and psychological well-being are two important components of the positive youth development approach (Catalano et al., 2004). This approach emphasizes the importance of meeting developmental needs, expressing that the individual has positive developmental abilities rather than a pathological orientation (Catalano et al., 2002; Catalano et al., 2004). In this approach, in addition to resilience and psychological well-being, one of the basic components is hope and these components are interrelated (Catalano et al., 2004). Furthermore, this approach argues that hope and despair are conceptually similar because they express beliefs about the future (Zhou et al., 2020). In the context of the positive youth development approach, an increase in indi-

viduals' resilience levels depending on their life goals may also create an increase in their psychological well-being and may be a resource for replacing hopelessness with hope. The conclusion of the present study that resilience plays a mediating role in the relationship between life goals and hopelessness may be related to psychological well-being, which increases due to life goals and resilience and is a negative predictor of hopelessness.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was carried out with students studying at six different state universities in Turkey. The generalizability of the results can be increased by carrying out similar studies with students from different countries and cultures with different characteristics. The lack of data about participants' perceived social support creates another limitation because social support is a confounding variable that can affect the resilience and hopelessness of participants (Han-Mo et al., 2014). Considering that the university students participating in this study were staying home due to the COVID-19 pandemic and did not continue their formal education face-to-face, the lack of data about their perceptions of staying home and the uncertainty in the process creates another limitation. It can be said that uncertainty can be another confounding variable that can be related to hope/hopelessness and resilience (Saricam et al., 2020).

Some recommendations can be made about the results of the present study. In our study, we reached the conclusion that life goals are a predictor of resilience, and we believe that this result is due to the fact that life goals are a factor of resilience. Therefore, future experimental research can be designed to increase resilience by including sessions about forming life goals, and thus testing experimentally the effect of life goals on resilience. Psychological

well-being of individuals is closely related to their life goals, resilience and hopelessness. Based on this, in addition to the mediating role of resilience in the relationship between future life goals and hopelessness, studies can be designed to test the mediator and regulatory effects of individuals' psychological well-being levels. Interventions can be set forth to help students, who take part in psychological counseling services on account of feeling hopeless, set life goals and increase their resilience. In addition, life goals and resilience can be included in psycho-educational programs organized to prevent students' hopelessness. Parents can be given training on parental attitudes that will help their children set life goals and increase their resilience. This way, it can be possible to prevent students at university age from experiencing hopelessness.

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