

## Relationships among Resilience, Social Support, Coping, and Psychological Well-Being among University Students

### Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Psikolojik Dayanıklılık, Sosyal Destek, Başa Çıkma ve İyi-Oluş Arasındaki İlişkiler

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among resilience, social support, coping, and psychological well-being in university students. Data were gathered on 309 students who are studying at the Trakya University. Participants completed several instruments: the Flourishing Scale, Resilience Scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Ways of Coping Inventory, and a demographic information form. Correlation, standard multiple regression, and hierarchical regression analyses were performed on the data. Significant relationships were found among study variables. Results of regression analyses indicated that psychological well-being was statistically predicted by resilience, coping, and social support from family, friends, and from significant others. Results of the mediation analysis revealed that social support and coping skills partially mediated the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being. The implications were discussed in the light of existing literature, and suggestions were made for college counselors.

**Keywords:** psychological well-being, resilience, social support, coping.

**Öz:** Bu araştırmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinde psikolojik dayanıklılık, sosyal destek, stresle başa çıkma ve psikolojik iyi oluş değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkilerin incelenmesidir. Veriler, Trakya Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim görmekte olan 309 öğrenciden toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, Psikolojik İyi Oluş Ölçeği, Kendini Toparlama Gücü Ölçeği, Çok Boyutlu Algılanan Sosyal Destek Ölçeği, Stresle Başa Çıkma Tarzları Ölçeği ve Kişisel Bilgi Formunu doldurmuşlardır. Verilerin analizinde korelasyon, standart çoklu regresyon ve hiyerarşik regresyon analizleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada ele alınan değişkenler arasında anlamlı ilişkiler bulunmuştur. Regresyon analizi sonuçları psikolojik iyi oluşun, psikolojik dayanıklılık, stresle başa çıkma becerileri ve aileden, arkadaşlardan ve diğerlerinden alınan sosyal destek değişkenleri tarafından anlamlı bir şekilde yordandığını göstermiştir. Aracı değişken analizi sonuçları da, sosyal destek ve stresle başa çıkma becerilerinin, psikolojik iyi oluş ve psikolojik dayanıklılık değişkenleri arasındaki ilişkide kısmi aracılık rolü olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular mevcut literatür ışığında tartışılmış ve psikolojik danışmanlar için bazı önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** psikolojik iyi oluş, psikolojik dayanıklılık, sosyal destek, başa çıkma.

Recent research in the field of psychology has focused on the strengths of individuals, groups and institutions, rather than on treating psychological disorders (Seligman, 2005). The emerging positive psychology field investigates the factors and situations that support the development of individuals and helps reveal the positive aspects of people in the most effective and efficient way.

One of the concepts of positive psychology that has been widely studied for over 20 years is that of psychological well-being. According to Ryff and Keyes (1995), psychological well-being includes

individuals' life goals and their pursuit of meaningful lives, positive self-perceptions, the quality of relationships with others, environmental mastery, autonomy and self-acceptance. Essentially it refers to using one's potential for personal growth in a positive way.

Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, and Biswas-Diener (2010) engage with the concept of psychological well-being with a new term they call "psychosocial flourishing" and measure it with a tool called the "Flourishing Scale". This scale includes various items, such as having supportive

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and rewarding relationships, making a contribution to the happiness of others, being respected by others and having a purposeful and meaningful life.

Factors such as searching for a meaningful and purposeful life as well as building positive and quality relationships with others affect health both physiologically and psychologically. Such a combination make think of resilience in terms of physical and psychological health, underlining a point on the mind and the body in understanding positive functioning (Fava & Tomba, 2009; Ryff, Singer, Love, & Essex, 1998).

Resilience, a concept studied by researchers from different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and biology, has been variously described as positive adaptation to the environment despite risky situations and difficulties (Masten, 2001); a positive personal trait after experiencing short-lived trauma (Bonanno, 2004; Klohnen, 1996); a coping skill in response to stress, loss and challenges (Begun, 1993); a multi-dimensional concept that varies depending on context, time, age, gender, and cultural origin. (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

People throughout their lives are exposed to various stressful events that result in either positive or negative outcomes. While some people can deal with such events effectively, others often fail to. Those people who maintain their physical and psychological health despite challenging and troublesome circumstances are identified as being “resilient”. They use adaptive coping strategies and typically convert stressful situations into learning and developmental opportunities (Kaner & Bayraklı, 2009). From this perspective resilience can be said to be a positive and adaptive way to face stressful events (Dyer & McGuinness, 1996). As mentioned, one of the significant properties protecting individuals from the potentially damaging effects of stress and helping to make them resilient is the use of coping strategies. In the literature, coping has been defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141); also the ways that individuals manage the strain caused by stressful situations (Lyubomirsky, 2007). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are two types of coping strategies, (i) problem-focused coping, and (ii) emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is a strategy individuals use when they conclude that it is possible to manage and control the stressful event; emotion-focused coping is typically used when individuals are unable to

control or solve the problems they face (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus & Folkman, 1985).

Boerner (2004) and Folkman, Newman, Lamb, and Shipley (1986) have stated that coping is a significant factor in the adaptation process and may affect individual’s assessment of the situation. In this process, social support emerges as an important source of coping. Basically, social support has been variously defined as social and psychological resources that an individual obtains from his/her environment (Yıldırım, 1997); and supplementary resources provided by others (peers, family, teachers, etc.) for individuals to deal with problems they come across. Obtaining social support gives meaning to the life of the individual. However, it also strengthens individuals’ ties with other people and provides a sense of belonging to the group (Schwarzer, Knoll, & Rieckmann, 2004).

For children and adolescents, family members and peers are important sources of social support. Many researchers have suggested that children are able to expand their capacity to overcome stressful events through the use of social support (e.g., Cutrona, 1990; cited by Cicognani, 2011). In parallel with this, Çeçen (2008) expressed that multidimensional perceived social support has been acquired from three different sources that are friends, family and significant others such as neighbors, relatives, teachers, etc. Research has revealed that individuals with social support, having many friends and building positive relationship with others tend to be happier (Diener & Seligman, 2002). In addition to this, social support helps individuals to deal with traumatic and stressful events, allows them to make worthwhile decisions (Stroebe, 2000; Wills & Fegan, 2001).

Existing research has indicated that psychological well-being has been related to various concepts such as personality (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), resilience, coping (Christopher, 2000), social support, emotions, physical health, and wealth (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Based on such findings, it can be considered whether each of these concepts is a significant indicator of psychological well-being separately. As stated in previous paragraphs, it is clear that resilience has been related with adaptive responses to adversity (Zautra, Arewasikporn, & Davis, 2010). Ryff and Singer (2003), expressed that resilient individuals were usually able to sustain their physical and psychological health and had the ability to recover more quickly from stressful events. This statement draws attention to two important concepts linked with resilience which are psychological well-being and coping. Hence, previous studies on resilience and well-being showed that resilience has a fundamental

role in accounting for well-being and also is thought to be effective in enhancing individuals' psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2001; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011). Also, numerous studies have examined the relationships between well-being and coping and suggested that coping plays a key role in psychological well-being (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013; Kappe & van der Flier, 2012). Especially, social support which is considered as one of the most effective coping strategies was found to predict subjective (Kahn, Hessling, & Russell, 2003) and emotional well-being (Holland & Holahan, 2003). As stated above, resilience, coping and social support separately were associated with well-being. In this study, we aimed to find out whether social support and coping would serve as mediators in the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being. In other words, the influence of resilience on psychological well-being was examined via social support and coping.

Transition to university life might be stressful for some reasons, such as academic requirements, living away from family, efforts for independence from parents, career indecisiveness, interpersonal and romantic relationship difficulties, etc. University students throughout their educational life may have to cope with these problems to continue their life. So, identifying to what extent resilience, social support and coping influence psychological well-being might contribute to better understanding especially for the university counseling services in preparing and implementing the activities enhancing well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following related research questions:

1. Do resilience, social support and coping skills significantly predict psychological well-being?
2. Does social support mediate the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being?
3. Does coping mediate the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being?

## Method

### Participants

The participants of the study were 309 (male= 105, female= 203, 1 unspecified) volunteer students recruited from the Trakya University, Edirne, Turkey. They were selected by a convenience sampling procedure, and the sample age ranged between 18 and 31 years of age ( $M= 20.91$ ,  $SD= 1.69$ ). Fifty-one participants (16.5 %) were freshmen, 108 (35 %) were sophomores, 34 (11 %) were juniors, and 116 (37.5 %) were seniors.

### Instruments

**The Flourishing Scale** (Diener et al., 2010). This is an 8-item measure assessing psychological well-being. Each item on the scale is responded to using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strong Disagreement' to 'Strong Agreement'. Examples of items to respond to are: "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life" and "I am optimistic about my future". Higher scores indicate more positive view of various aspects of life. The original scale's internal reliability was found to be .87 (Diener et al., 2010). The scale was adapted to Turkish by Telef (2011), and the Turkish version's internal reliability was found to be .80, with test-retest reliability being .86 (Telef, 2011). In the current study, internal reliability of the scale was found to be .82.

**The Resilience Scale** (Wagnild & Young, 1993). This scale determines the degree of an individual's resilience, which is a 'positive personality characteristic'. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree), with higher scores on the scale indicating higher resilience. Sample items include "I usually manage, one way or another" and "I have enough energy to do what I have to do". Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale was .91 (Wagnild & Young, 1993). The scale was adapted to Turkish by Terzi (2006), with the Turkish version's internal reliability being .82, and the test-retest reliability was .84 (Terzi, 2006). Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale in this study was found to be .86.

**The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support** (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). This scale assesses perceived support from three notable sources, namely family, friends, and significant others. It is a 12-item scale involving a 7-point Likert range from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). Sample items include, for family, "my family really tries to help me"; for friends, "I can count on my friends when things go wrong"; and, for significant others, "I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me". The original scale's Cronbach alpha for the family support subscale was .87, for the friends subscale .85, for significant others .91, and for the total scale .88. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Eker and Arkar (1995), with the internal reliability being .85 for the total scale in regard to university students. In the current study, internal reliability for the family support subscale was .81, for friends .86, significant others .95, and for the total scale .84.

**The Ways of Coping Inventory** (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). This instrument seeks to measure the coping strategies of individuals. The scale is a 66-item tool and participants respond to items on a 4-point Likert

scale. The original scale was shortened and adapted to Turkish by Şahin and Durak (1995). This shortened Turkish version consists of 30 items with five subscales: self-confident approach (7 items), optimistic approach (5 items), helpless approach (8 items), submissive approach (6 items), and seeking social support (4 items). Sample items for the Turkish version include "I hoped for a miracle" and "I try to be optimistic". Higher scores on a subscale indicates that the individual frequently uses that coping style; also higher scores on the total scale mean that individuals are seen to have effective coping skills. In the present study, only total coping scores were used. Reliability analysis for the shortened Turkish version indicated a Cronbach alpha coefficient range between .45 and .80 (Şahin & Durak, 1995). In the current study, internal reliability for self-confident was .82, optimistic .71, helpless .74, submissive .71, seeking social support .63, and for the total scale .66.

### Data Analysis

The instruments were administered to a total of 327 students. Eight of them were excluded because of leaving most of the items unanswered. A missing value analysis was conducted and missing values were replaced by the series mean method. Nine cases were univariate outliers because of exceeding a z score of +3.29 and -3.29; these cases were also excluded from

the data set. By using Mahalanobis distance, one case was identified as a multivariate outlier and was also deleted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Finally, 309 cases remained for data analysis.

After investigating multicollinearity of the data set, it was detected that no Variance Inflation Factor values were greater than 10, and values of tolerance did not approach 0. Thus, it could be stated that there was no multicollinearity problem in the data set. Then, first, correlation coefficients were examined among all study variables. Second, a standard multiple regression analysis was performed between psychological well-being as the dependent variable and resilience, social support, and coping as the independent variables. Third, two separate mediation analyses were performed to test mediating effects of social support and coping on the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being.

### Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables are displayed in Table 1. As shown, psychological well-being had significant relationships with all predictor variables. Psychological well-being significantly correlated positively with resilience, family support, friends' support, significant others support, and coping skills.

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Study Variables

Variables	M	SD	R				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. Wellbeing	44.82	7.07					
2. RES	128.99	17.44	.57**				
3. MSPSS-Fa	24.08	5.08	.34**	.22**			
4. MSPSS-Fr	23.12	5.18	.36**	.14*	.23**		
5. MSPSS-Sig	20.66	9.00	.29**	.14*	.17**	.25**	
6. Coping	57.10	11.34	.55**	.59**	.28**	.28**	.18**

Notes: RES: Resilience Scale, MSPSS-Fa: Perceived Social Support from Family, MSPSS-Fr: Perceived Social Support from Friends, MSPSS-Sig: Perceived Social Support from Significant Others. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Predictors of Psychological Well-Being

Table 2 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), the standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), the semi-partial correlations ( $sr^2$ ),  $R^2$ , and the adjusted  $R^2$ . R for regression was significantly different from zero,  $F(5, 303) = 56.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , with  $R^2$  at .48. The results revealed that all five independent variables made a statistically significant contribution to psychological well-being. Resilience made the strongest contribution, while perceived support from significant others made the lowest contribution to psychological well-

being. The five independent variables contributed 18 % in unique variance and 30 % of explained shared variance to the prediction of psychological well-being. Altogether, .48 of the variability in psychological well-being was predicted by resilience, coping skills, family support, friends support, and significant others support. The size and direction of the relationships indicate that when individuals are more resilient, have more effective coping skills, perceive more social support from their families, friends, and significant others, then their psychological well-being is higher.

**Table 2.** Results of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	B	SE <sub>B</sub>	β	t	p	sr <sup>2</sup> (unique)
Constant	5.42	2.53	-	2.15	.033	
RES	.15	.02	.36	6.99	.001	.08
Coping	.14	.03	.23	4.19	.001	.03
MSPSS-Fr	.25	.06	.18	4.12	.001	.03
MSPSS-Fa	.19	.06	.14	3.12	.002	.02
MSPSS-Sig	.10	.03	.13	3.04	.003	.02

Notes: R = .69, R<sup>2</sup> = .48, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .47, F (5, 303) = 56.04  
 Unique variability= .18; shared variability= .30

**Mediating Effects of Social Support and Coping on the Relationship between Resilience and Psychological Well-being**

To examine the indirect effects of resilience on psychological well-being through social support and coping skills, the hierarchical regression analyses were performed. These analyses were conducted following steps suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). First regression showed that resilience significantly

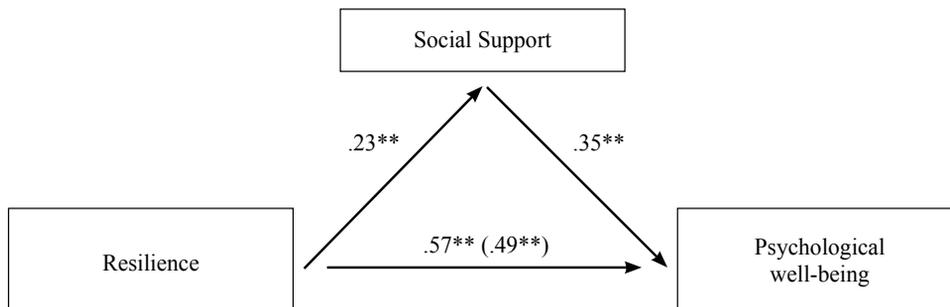
predicts psychological well-being (R<sup>2</sup>= .32, β= .57, t= 12.08, p= .00). Then social support was entered in the equation and results revealed that social support was a significant predictor of psychological well-being (R<sup>2</sup>= .32, β= .35, t= 7.89, p= .00). As shown in Table 3, however, the effect of resilience on the psychological well-being was reduced after social support was included in the analysis (β= .49, t= 11.09, p= .00).

**Table 3.** Results of Mediation Analysis for Social Support and Coping

		Variable	B	SE <sub>B</sub>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	t	p
Social support	Step 1	Resilience	.23	.02	.57	.32	12.08	.00
	Step 2	Resilience	.20	.02	.49	.43	11.09	.00
		Social support	.18	.02	.35		7.89	.00
		Variable	B	SE <sub>B</sub>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	t	p
Coping	Step 1	Resilience	.23	.02	.57	.32	12.08	.00
	Step 2	Resilience	.15	.02	.37	.39	6.72	.00
		Coping	.21	.03	.33		6.02	.00

Results of the Sobel test revealed that mediator effect of social support was statistically significant (Z= 3.64, p< 0.01) in relation between resilience and psychological well-being (Figure

1). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), these results revealed that social support partially mediated the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being.

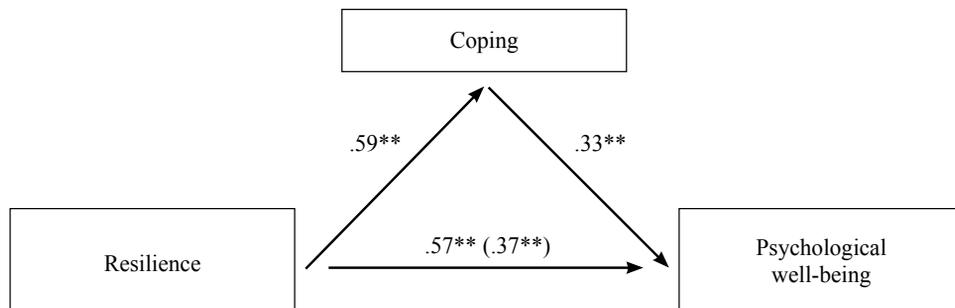


**Figure 1.** Model of the Mediational Effect of Social Support on the Relationship between Resilience and Psychological Well-Being. Value in parentheses is the reduced coefficient after mediator added relationship. \*\* p< .01.

As shown in previous analysis, resilience significantly predicts psychological well-being. To test mediational effect of coping skills, this variable was entered in the regression equation. Results revealed that coping skills were significant predictor of psychological well-being ( $R^2 = .39$ ,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 6.02$ ,  $p = .00$ ). However, as can be seen in Table 3, the effect of resilience on the psychological well-being

was reduced after coping skills were entered in the analysis ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $t = 6.72$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

The significance of the mediation effect of coping skills was confirmed by the Sobel test ( $Z = 6.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results indicated that coping skills partially mediated the relationship between two study variables (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Model of the Mediation Effect of Coping on the Relationship between Resilience and Psychological Well-Being. Value in parentheses is the reduced coefficient after mediator added relationship. \*\*  $p < .01$

### Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the relationships among resilience, coping skills, perceived social support, and psychological well-being in university students in Turkey. Statistically significant relationships were found among study variables. Further, regression analysis revealed that resilience, coping, family support, friends support, and significant others support significantly predicted psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being as a broad concept includes various individual characteristics, such as competency, optimism, and purpose and meaning in life (Diener et al., 2010). Furthermore, resilience can be conceptualized as a construct that reduces the negative effects of stressful life events and facilitates adaptation (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Thus, it would be expected that individuals who are more resilient, would feel more psychological well-being. This finding is in line with the relevant literature on psychological well-being and resilience (Lai & Mak, 2009; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011; Van Schaick, 2010). For example, Van Schaick (2010) found in early adults that resilience significantly predicted psychological well-being. Similar to that study, Lai and Mak (2009) reported that resilience contributed to positive well-being, which relates to better health.

In addition, findings suggested that individuals who had effective coping strategies had greater psychological well-being. This finding is also

consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Cicognani, 2011; Otrar, Ekşi, Dilmaç, & Şirin, 2010; Qiao, Li, & Hu, 2011; Uskul & Greenglass, 2005). For example, with Turkic and relative societies' students, Otrar et al. (2010) found that active coping strategies were positively correlated with psychological well-being. Similarly, Cicognani (2011) reported that well-being was increased when withdrawal coping strategies were used less by adolescents. Self-confident, optimistic, and seeking social support can be seen as examples of effective or active coping styles. Contrary to ineffective ways, such as denial and withdrawal, effective or active ways of coping help reduce distress, and help solve problems, and so individuals' well-being would also likely increase. In addition, Bridges (2008) indicates that coping has been a significant part of developmental well-being.

Another finding of the study, as expected, was that perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others significantly contributed to psychological well-being. This is also consistent with previous studies. Having social networks provide individuals with feelings of self-worth, with positive experiences, and with a sense of overall well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). As well, the scale that was used in order to assess psychological well-being in this study, the Flourishing Scale, has several items regarding social relationships. Thus, having healthy and supportive relationships with family members, friends, and significant others seems to increase

psychological well-being. Similarly, Corsano, Majorano and Champretavy (2006) reported that having positive relationships with family and friends increased the psychological well-being of adolescents.

In the current study, mediator analyses were indicated that social support and coping skills played a mediator role partially in the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being. These findings suggested that as resilience increases, psychological well-being increases, and social support and coping skills separately mediate the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being. Social support and effective coping strategies contribute to positive effects of resilience on psychological well-being. Supporting this finding, Carr (2004) has described factors that related resilience in adolescents. Social support network and coping skills are examples of these factors. In addition, Li and Nishikawa (2012) found that trait resilience significantly predicted college students' active coping.

Overall, the results suggest that resilience, coping skills, and perceived social support contribute to university students' psychological well-being. These findings have some implications for college counselors. In the light of these findings, university counseling centers might provide psycho-educational programs to students in order to increase their psychological well-being. For example, students can be taught effective coping strategies in response to stress. Also, students can gain interpersonal relationship skills to enhance their social relationships with families, friends, and significant others. College counselors and other mental health professionals should provide preventive programs to students as well as treating psychological problems. Hereby, providing preventive interventions regarding resilience might be useful for students. Thus, improving these particular areas of students' lives is likely to affect positively their psychological well-being.

There are some limitations of the current study. One is that it was done within a cross-sectional structure. Various dimensions of the students' psychological

well-being and its relationships with other relevant concepts would be more clearly investigated with a longitudinal design. Another limitation of the study is that the participants were recruited from a single university using a convenience procedure. Therefore, generalizability of the findings to other university students is limited. It is important to obtain data from different universities to broaden generalizability of the results. Third, the study variables were measured by self-report scales. Respondents might have been affected by social desirability issues, inaccurate memory recall, or by self-deception. Fourth, interpretations of the results should be made cautiously, for causality between the variables cannot be assured. The relationships between study variables might be reciprocal.

In summary, this study contributes to existing literature on psychological well-being and related variables. Resilience, social support and coping skills have been found to be predictors of psychological well-being. In addition, indirect effect of resilience through social support and coping on psychological well-being was proved. Further research in the well-being field might expand existing knowledge by examining to what extent various specific personal, social, and academic variables affect well-being in university students. In the current study, the partial mediating effects of social support and coping in the relationships between resilience and psychological well-being have been proved. Future researchers could examine other variables which might play significant roles between these two variables. For instance, the role of various coping strategies might be investigated in the associations between resilience and psychological well-being. Also, the effects of different social support types such as tangible, appraisal, and emotional could be explored in the relationship between two variables. In addition, further research might focus on measuring different dimensions and indicators of well-being. These studies will also enhance quality of counseling services provided to students at universities.

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