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# Parenting styles and life satisfaction of Turkish adolescents

Fulya Cenkseven - Önder

Education Faculty, Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey. E-mail: [fulyac@cu.edu.tr](mailto:fulyac@cu.edu.tr)

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**This study examined adolescents' perception of satisfaction from various life domains according to gender and parenting styles among 562 Turkish adolescents [53.2% girls; Mean (M) age = 14.1, Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.85]. The participants completed the multidimensional students' life satisfaction scale and the parenting style inventory. The results indicated that the level of family satisfaction of female adolescents was lower than that of male adolescents. The scores of adolescents from authoritative families were higher than those of adolescents from neglectful families in satisfaction with friends, living environments and family domains. In a similar way, adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent had higher scores than adolescents who perceived their parents as neglectful in the life satisfaction dimensions of friends, family and self. No significant difference was found between authoritative and indulgent styles for any dimension of life satisfaction. The results are discussed in relation to previous research; study limitations and further research directions are also outlined.**

**Key words:** Parenting styles, life satisfaction, adolescence.

## INTRODUCTION

The presence of contentment plays a crucial role in adolescents' achievement of developmental tasks, fulfilling social roles and feeling a sense of success. In recent years, there has been increased attention and interest in happiness and well-being in children and adolescents (Huebner, 2003). Subjective well-being comprises three components: A frequent positive effect, an infrequent negative effect, and a global sense of satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984). Life satisfaction, the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984), has been defined as a cognitive judgment of the quality of one's life as a whole (Diener et al., 1999). Life satisfaction measures are derived from three conceptual frameworks that have unidimensional (global and general life satisfaction) and multidimensional foundations (Huebner, 2004). Huebner (1991) considered life satisfaction to be a multidimensional concept consisting of the satisfaction derived from family, friends, school, environment and self. The present study also approaches life satisfaction as a multidimensional concept.

Studies show that as early adolescence progresses, there is a decline in global life satisfaction (Casas et al.,

2007; Goldbeck et al., 2007), family satisfaction (Goldbeck et al., 2007; Huebner et al., 2005; Nickerson and Nagle, 2004), and perceived school satisfaction (Huebner et al., 2005). In accordance with these results, it can be said that tackling the issue of life satisfaction during adolescence is important. Even though some studies indicate that global life satisfaction is not relevant to gender (Dew and Huebner, 1994; Huebner, 1991; Huebner and Alderman, 1993), several studies analyzing life satisfaction multidimensionally show that some domains of perceived life satisfaction, such as school (Çivitçi, 2009; Huebner et al., 2005; Nickerson and Nagle, 2004) and friend satisfaction (Casas et al., 2007; Huebner et al., 2005), showed a significant difference in favor of females.

Studies show that high life satisfaction in adolescents is associated with extraversion (Fogle et al., 2002; McKnight et al., 2002), self-esteem (Dew and Huebner, 1994; Mowrer and Parker, 2004), perceived social support (Gilman and Huebner, 2006; Khan and Husain, 2010; Petito and Cummins, 2000), internal locus of control (Ash and Huebner, 2002; Dew and Huebner,

1994), positive interactional relations (Gilman and Huebner, 2006), personal congruity (Huebner and Gilman, 2006), increased self-efficacy (Suldo and Huebner, 2006), coping with stress (Deniz and Işık, 2010), social skills and leadership (Greenspoon and Saklofske, 1997). Low life satisfaction in adolescents is related to aggressive behaviors (Suldo and Huebner, 2004a; Valois et al., 2006), depression (Gilman and Huebner, 2006), suicide (Valois et al., 2004), risky sexual behaviors (Valois et al., 2002), and substance abuse (Zulling et al., 2001).

In summary, life satisfaction in adolescents can be interpreted as an important indicator of adaptation. Therefore, it remains important to examine life satisfaction and its sources in adolescents. Life satisfaction in children and adolescents are associated with a large number of cultural and psychosocial factors. Family life can be regarded as one of the most important psychosocial factors. In recent years, studies have indicated that there is a relationship between perceived parenting styles and various forms of psychopathology during adolescence. For example, Brand et al. (2009) showed that there was a correlation between favorable parenting styles and low anxiety and depression and favorable sleep patterns. In this study, the relationships between perceived parenting styles and multidimensional life satisfaction, as an indicator of positive psychological functioning were examined.

### Parenting styles and life satisfaction

Many empirical studies show that parent relations in many cultures have an important impact on adolescents' life satisfaction. For example, Dew and Huebner (1994) reported that the quality of parent relations with adolescents refers to the highest life satisfaction. Similarly, Gilman and Huebner (2005) reported that the adolescents who have higher life satisfaction have more positive parent relationships. In addition, Leung and Zhang (2000) and Man (1991) determined that the quality of a mother-father-child relationship predicts a stronger influence on the adolescents' life satisfaction than does the quality of the peer relationships or school experiences. Shek (1997) reported a negative correlation between life satisfaction and the conflicts experienced with parents. Correspondingly, Young et al. (1995) reported a positive correlation between parents' intrinsic support and adolescents' life satisfaction. Other studies that explore life satisfaction and family variables show that life satisfaction is related to parent attachment (Nickerson and Nagle, 2004), positive family relations (Chang et al., 2003; Gilman and Huebner, 2006), positive parent attitudes (Suldo and Huebner, 2004b) and low parental psychological control (Seibel and Johnson, 2001). Additionally, as the level of the family socio-

economic status increases, so does the level of life satisfaction (Huebner et al., 2005; Seligson et al., 2003). Therefore, it can be said that the life satisfaction of adolescents is related to parenting styles.

Parenting styles are commonly described using four categories – authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful – which are based on the elements of parental control and parental warmth. An authoritative parenting style is defined by high strictness and high warmth, an authoritarian style is characterized by high strictness and low warmth, an indulgent style is characterized by low strictness and high warmth, and a neglectful style is characterized by low strictness and low warmth (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1994, 1992). The present study considered parenting styles based on this classification system.

Parenting variables are reported to be relevant to the well-being of adolescents (Hair et al., 2008; Piko and Hamvai, 2010), and gender has a role as well. Piko (2001) states that the significance of gender differences in adolescents' well-being has been increasingly observed in light of psychosocial and biological changes. Piko and Fitzpatrick (2002) also reported gender differences in the risk and protective factor structure of adolescent well-being. There are studies demonstrating that general differences exist between females and males in terms of life satisfaction levels (Çivitçi, 2009; Neto, 1993). A study on adolescents performed in Turkey showed that global life satisfaction was noted to be higher in girls than in boys (Köker, 1991). However, another study (Gün and Bayraktar, 2008) related to adolescents showed that global life satisfaction did not differ according to gender, while Çivitçi (2009) identified a significant difference in school satisfaction in female adolescents but did not find any significant difference in other dimensions. These inconsistent results show that the effects of gender in global life satisfaction and other life satisfaction dimensions could vary between different societies and types of researched groups. Turkey is a country where interpersonal relationships composed of close affairs with families, relatives and neighbors play a crucial role (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1984). Because Turkey is a traditional society, it is assumed that there could be differences in satisfaction with some life domains according to gender in Turkish sampling.

Some research results show that culture has an effect on well-being. For example, Oishi et al. (1999) reached the conclusion that individualistic cultures have a higher potential for predicting life satisfaction with freedom than do collectivist cultures. In contrast, Yeh and Yang (2006) showed the presence of correlations between low self-esteem and happiness, and between disconnection from parents and psychological isolation in Chinese adolescents. In accordance with these results, culture can be assumed to have an effect on the connection between parents and life satisfaction. Many Western studies show

that there is a relationship between parenting attitudes and life satisfaction. However, these studies have dealt with the relationships between parenting styles and global life satisfaction. Correspondingly, there are few studies dealing with multi-dimensional structures of life satisfaction in accordance with parenting attitudes in samples of Turkish adolescents (Çivitçi, 2009), with more studies performed on the global life satisfaction of late-adolescents (Cenkseven and Akbaş, 2007; Tuzgöl Dost, 2007). Therefore, this current study aimed to examine the perceived satisfaction within different life domains according to gender and perceived parenting styles in adolescents. This study mainly hypothesized that adolescents who perceive their parents as authoritative will report a higher satisfaction with family, friends, school, living environment and self. This study also tests the hypothesis that Turkish male adolescents report a higher satisfaction with some domains of life (for example, family) than Turkish females do.

## METHOD

### Participants

The study has been conducted on a total of 562 adolescents, of which 299 were females (53.2%) and 263 were males (46.8%), who attend four middle schools located in a city in southern Turkey. The ages of the participating adolescents are between 13 and 15 years [Mean (M) = 14.10, standard deviation (SD) = 0.85], of whom 247 of the students are in 6th grade (44%), 180 are in 7th grade (32%), and 135 are in 8th grade (24%). Of the parents, 13.7% of the mothers of students (77) and 2.5% of the fathers of the students (14) are illiterate; 48.8% of the mothers of students (274) and 45.6% of the fathers of the students (256) are primary school graduates; 16.4% of the mothers of students (92) and 19.4% of the fathers of the students (109) are middle school graduates; 14.6% of the mothers of students (82) and 21% of the fathers of the students (118) are high school graduates; and 5% of the mothers of students (28) and 9.8% of the fathers of the students (55) are university graduates.

### Measures

#### *Multidimensional students' life satisfaction scale (MSLSS)*

The MSLSS (Huebner, 1994) contains 40 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from "never (1)" to "almost always (4)". The MSLSS measures adolescents' satisfaction in various life domains (friends, school, family, living environment and self) as well as general satisfaction. Higher scores on the MSLSS represent higher satisfaction in various life domains. The MSLSS was adapted into Turkish by Çivitçi (2007); the Turkish form consists of 36 items. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale were 0.81 for "friends", 0.79 for "school", 0.86 for "family", 0.75 for "living environment", 0.73 for "self" and 0.90 for "total".

#### *The parenting style inventory (PSI)*

The PSI (Lamborn et al., 1991) contains 26 items. The PSI is

composed of three subscales: acceptance/involvement, strictness/supervision, and psychological autonomy. These subscales consist of 9, 8 and 9 items, respectively. Higher scores on the PSI subscales reflect more pronounced acceptance, strictness and psychological autonomy. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were 0.72, 0.76, and 0.82, respectively. Four parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and neglectful) were identified from the scores obtained through the dimensions of acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision. This study administered a Turkish version of the PSI (Yilmaz, 2000) that reflected three main dimensions of the original form of the scale. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale were 0.80 for "acceptance/involvement", 0.63 for "strictness/supervision" and 0.60 for "psychological autonomy".

### Procedures

Before commencing to gather data, the required official permission was obtained from the Provincial National Education Directorate. In addition, the headmaster of four middle schools gave permission to gather data. Then, the necessary information regarding the purpose of study and the issue of being a volunteer was provided to the participants. Informative forms were also given to the participants and their parents.

All participants' confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. The questionnaires took 30 min to complete and were completed in classes under teacher supervision.

### Analysis

The parenting styles in this study were classified primarily. To identify the parenting styles, the scores obtained from the PSI's "acceptance/involvement" and "strictness/supervision" subscales were used. The respective median values for these subscales were 28 and 29. From the results, the parents of 125 adolescents could be identified as authoritative (high acceptance and strictness), 140 could be identified as neglectful (low acceptance and strictness), 142 could be identified as authoritarian (low acceptance and high strictness), and 126 could be identified as indulgent (high acceptance and low strictness).

The means, standard deviation distributions and MANOVA were calculated using SPSS, version 13.0.

## RESULTS

Differences in the dimensions of life satisfaction between the four parenting styles were assessed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with parenting styles and gender as the independent variables, and school, friends, family, living environment and self satisfaction as the dependent variables. The results showed that the combined dependent variables were significantly related to gender ( $\lambda = 0.97$ ,  $F_{(5, 550)} = 3.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) and parenting styles ( $\lambda = 0.83$ ,  $F_{(15, 1518.71)} = 7.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .06$ ). However, no interaction effects were found ( $\lambda = .97$ ,  $F_{(15, 1518.71)} = 1.21$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ).

Following the MANOVA results, a follow-up univariate analysis was conducted as the variables of gender and parenting attitudes were significant (ANOVAs, Table 2).

**Table 1.** Means scores and standard deviations of all measures for males and females.

Satisfaction variable	Parenting styles	Female		Male		Whole sample	
		n	M(SD)	n	M(SD)	n	M(SD)
Friends satisfaction	Authoritative	85	3.42(0.47)	40	3.39(0.46)	125	3.41(0.46)
	Authoritarian	93	3.18(0.53)	49	3.24(0.52)	142	3.20(0.52)
	Indulgent	54	3.54(0.40)	72	3.44(0.51)	126	3.48(0.47)
	Neglectful	67	3.28(0.54)	102	3.11(0.52)	169	3.18(0.53)
	Total	299	3.33(0.51)	263	3.27(0.53)	562	3.30(0.52)
School satisfaction	Authoritative	85	2.91(0.56)	40	3.04(0.60)	125	2.95(0.57)
	Authoritarian	93	2.77(0.59)	49	2.79(0.66)	142	2.78(0.61)
	Indulgent	54	2.90(0.63)	72	2.79(0.54)	126	2.83(0.58)
	Neglectful	67	2.60(0.53)	102	2.68(0.62)	169	2.65(0.58)
	Total	299	2.79(0.59)	263	2.78(0.61)	562	2.79(0.60)
Living environment satisfaction	Authoritative	85	3.07(0.61)	40	3.03(0.67)	125	3.06(0.63)
	Authoritarian	93	2.82(0.69)	49	3.01(0.66)	142	3.14(0.52)
	Indulgent	54	3.12(0.72)	72	2.89(0.65)	126	2.99(0.67)
	Neglectful	67	2.68(0.67)	102	2.81(0.51)	169	2.76(0.58)
	Total	299	2.91(0.69)	263	2.90(0.61)	562	2.91(0.65)
Family satisfaction	Authoritative	85	3.28(0.60)	40	3.55(0.46)	125	3.36(0.57)
	Authoritarian	93	2.96(0.68)	49	3.08(0.79)	142	3.00(0.72)
	Indulgent	54	3.32(0.56)	72	3.33(0.44)	126	3.32(0.47)
	Neglectful	67	2.67(0.68)	102	2.89(0.62)	169	2.80(0.65)
	Total	299	3.05(0.68)	263	3.16(0.66)	562	3.10(0.67)
Self satisfaction	Authoritative	85	3.23(0.53)	40	3.35(0.55)	125	3.27(0.54)
	Authoritarian	93	3.12(0.54)	49	3.17(0.48)	142	3.14(0.52)
	Indulgent	54	3.32(0.52)	72	3.33(0.44)	126	3.32(0.47)
	Neglectful	67	3.07(0.55)	102	3.05(0.58)	169	3.06(0.56)
	Total	299	3.18(0.54)	263	3.20(0.53)	562	3.19(0.54)

To control for Type I error, Bonferroni correction was performed, with a resulting significance level of  $0.05/5 = 0.01$ . The score obtained for family satisfaction according to gender was significant ( $F_{[1,554]} = 9.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), whereas the observed differences in the other dependent variables were not statistically significant. The perceived family satisfaction of male adolescents ( $M = 22.14$ ,  $SD = 4.63$ ) was higher than that of females ( $M = 21.37$ ,  $SD = 4.77$ ) (Table 1). According to parenting styles, significant differences were seen in the variables of perceived friend ( $F_{[1,554]} = 11.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), school ( $F_{[1,554]} = 7.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), family ( $F_{[1,554]} = 30.83$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and self satisfaction ( $F_{[1,554]} = 7.21$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In post-hoc comparisons, the significance level was accepted as  $0.01/5 = 0.002$ . The score for satisfaction with friends showed a significant difference between adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent or

authoritative and those who perceived their parents as neglectful, as well as between adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent and those who perceived them as authoritarian. Adolescents who perceived their parents as authoritative indicated higher satisfaction with school and living environment than those who perceived them as neglectful. When the scores related to family satisfaction were analyzed, the adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent and authoritative had a higher score than those who perceived them as neglectful; similarly, adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent had a higher score than those who perceived them as authoritarian. In addition, adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent had a higher score for perceived self satisfaction than those who perceived their parents as neglectful.

**Table 2.** Effects of gender and parenting styles on MSLSS subscales scores.

Source	Dependent variable	df	F	Partial $\eta^2$	p
Gender	Friends satisfaction	1	1.69	0.00	0.195
	School satisfaction	1	0.31	0.00	0.576
	Living satisfaction	1	0.04	0.00	0.832
	Family satisfaction	1	9.26	0.02	0.002
	Self satisfaction	1	0.74	0.00	0.391
Parenting styles	Friends satisfaction	3	11.31	0.06	0.001
	School satisfaction	3	7.20	0.04	0.001
	Living satisfaction	3	6.18	0.03	0.001
	Family satisfaction	3	30.83	0.14	0.001
	Self satisfaction	3	7.21	0.04	0.001
Gender × Parenting styles	Friends satisfaction	3	1.27	0.01	0.285
	School satisfaction	3	1.02	0.01	0.384
	Living satisfaction	3	2.76	0.02	0.041
	Family satisfaction	3	0.69	0.00	0.559
	Self satisfaction	3	0.37	0.00	0.772

## DISCUSSION

This study examined whether perceived satisfaction with different life domains varied according to adolescents' gender and perceived parenting styles. It was found that perceived satisfaction with different life domains showed a significant difference in the variables of gender and parenting styles, while no interaction effect was found between gender and parenting styles. A significant difference between females and males only in terms of perceived family satisfaction was found, with males reported to show significantly higher family satisfaction overall. However, earlier studies (Casas et al., 2007; Goldbeck et al., 2007; Nickerson and Nagle, 2004) have shown no significant difference in perceived family satisfaction. The difference of perceived family satisfaction in males and females in this current study may arise from cultural aspects. Turkish society is acknowledged as highly patriarchal with clear-cut gender role differences (Sakalli-Uğurlu and Beydoğan, 2002). Men wield basic decision-making power (Gök, 1994; Sakalli-Uğurlu and Beydoğan, 2002), and many women are not allowed to go shopping or pay visits to their families without the presence or permission of their husbands (Altınay and Arat, 2009). Given that the sampling in this study was composed of students whose parents were mostly graduates of primary school (thus having a low education level), it can be predicted that their households adopted traditional gender roles, with girls having a secondary status in their families compared to males. In traditional Turkish families, compliance and

dependency rather than autonomy are important (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2000), and girls are highly expected to follow these roles. Female adolescents encounter more social constraints than do male adolescents, and closeness with males is often disapproved (Oskey, 1985). Therefore, females are often led to feel more restricted and frustrated at home, possibly bringing about displeasure and unhappiness.

This study showed that parenting styles significantly affected all domains of life satisfaction in adolescents. Adolescents from indulgent and authoritative families acquired higher scores in life satisfaction dimensions than did adolescents from authoritarian and neglectful families. These results parallel previous studies indicating that as positive parenting attitudes and positive relationships with parents improve, so does life satisfaction (Chang et al., 2003; Çivitçi, 2009; Gilman and Huebner, 2006; Suldo and Huebner, 2004b).

This study showed that the adolescents who perceive their parents as authoritative have a higher satisfaction than those who perceive their parents as neglectful in terms of school, friends, the living environment and family. There are numerous studies that show positive relationships between authoritative parenthood and adolescents' well-being (Milevsky et al., 2007; Petito and Cummins, 2000; Suldo and Huebner, 2004b), and Suldo and Huebner (2004b) showed that a positive relationship between life satisfaction and parenting support existed. As authoritative parents show more attention and closeness to their children in comparison with neglectful parents (Maccoby and Martin, 1983), this may be a

reason for the difference in adolescents' satisfaction with the family and the living environment. Further, Baumrind (1991) showed that an authoritative parenting style contributes to self-reliance, social competence and responsibility in adolescents and that a neglectful parenting style increases behavioral problems and reduces adolescents' attention to school. Therefore, it is not surprising that the adolescents who perceive their parents as authoritative show a higher satisfaction with school and friends than do those who perceive them as neglectful.

Although an indulgent parenting style produces a high level of love and attention, supervision and control are low. These parents demonstrate a permissive tendency (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Adolescents who perceive their parents as indulgent have a significantly higher satisfaction with friends, family and self than those who perceive their parents as neglectful in particular. Indulgent parents showing permissive and sensitive behaviors may have a positive impact on their children's sense of self-esteem and contentment with themselves. In addition, increased acceptance and attention from parents may contribute to children feeling more comfortable and less restricted in the relationships with their friends. No significant difference was found in the scores of satisfaction with school and environment between adolescents who perceived their parents as indulgent and those who perceived them as neglectful. Baumrind (1991) reported that both indulgent and neglectful parenting styles produced decreased school attention and increased behavioral problems in children. The possible reason for this result may stem from a lack of supervision with the two parenting styles.

The fact that indulgent parents employ inadequate supervision has generally been thought to cause problems and reduce life satisfaction. However, this current study reported no significant difference between the perceptions of adolescents raised by indulgent and authoritative parents in terms of life satisfaction dimensions. Therefore, it was concluded that the dimension of parenting supervision did not have a considerable effect on adolescents' perceived satisfaction. Rather, it was thought that the dimension of acceptance and attention could have an effect on increasing life satisfaction. Leung et al. (2004) reported that whereas the life satisfaction of adolescents was predicted to be associated with perceived attention from mothers, the authors did not predict that life satisfaction would be related to perceived restrictions from mothers. Further studies should be performed related to this issue in the future.

The adolescents who perceive their parents as authoritarian have a lower level of satisfaction with friends than those who perceive their parents as indulgent, and they have a lower satisfaction with family than those who perceive their families as either indulgent

or authoritative. Insufficient emotional exchange transpires in authoritarian families, while acceptance and attention are high in indulgent families. A strict control is experienced in authoritarian families, whereas the level of control is realistic in authoritative families (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Considering these differences, it is not surprising that children raised in authoritarian families have a lower level of satisfaction with family and friends than those raised according to other parenting styles.

An overall view of this study shows that the lowest scores belong to the children of neglectful parents in all dimensions of life satisfaction. The parents who show authoritative, authoritarian or indulgent styles show some attention to their children. However, children of neglectful parents receive the message that they are absent; they feel that they are unnoticed and not respected. School psychological counselors should provide counseling and guidance to the children of these parents, and it will be important to carry out studies to gather knowledge on how to increase their life satisfaction. Moreover, further studies remain to be performed to understand the relationships between school, family and friends, the properties of their living environments and their internal characteristics. These issues will be helpful in identifying the content of the studies.

This present study concluded that male students experienced a higher level of satisfaction with family than did females. Further studies regarding family satisfaction according to gender can be conducted to shed light on other family-related variables, such as the parents' education level, socio-economic level, relationships between siblings, and the parents' expectations, to understand what types of roles these family-related variables play. In addition, intercultural studies should be performed to better understand the role of gender in life satisfaction dimensions given the inconsistencies in the research findings across individual cultural groups.

Given that parenting styles are related to all dimensions of adolescent life satisfaction, it remains immensely important to provide parents with education and seminars about effective communication and childrearing. Further, determining which dimensions (attention, control, etc.) of parenting styles have an effect on which dimensions of life satisfaction may contribute to the literature.

There are several limitations to the present study. First, this study did not examine maternal and paternal parenting styles individually. Future studies should specifically analyze maternal and paternal parenting styles and scrutinize them against various dimensions of their adolescents' life satisfaction. Furthermore, the generalizability of the study is limited by the fact that the adolescents participating in the study were collected from four middle schools in a single city. Another limitation of the study is that the education level of approximately half of the adolescents' parents was that of primary schooling or lower. Future studies regarding adolescent life satis-

faction should consider comparing different geographical regions, as well as the possible effects of parental education levels.

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