



OPEN Resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support mediate the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress

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Fear of happiness, a psychological construct reflecting the belief that happiness might lead to misfortune, represents a significant barrier to well-being. This study examines the mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support in the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress. A cross-sectional survey with 981 Turkish adults (mean age 23.93 years, 69.4% female) completed the self-reported measures of fear of happiness, resilience, meaning in life, perceived social support, and psychological distress. Results indicated that fear of happiness negatively predicted resilience, meaning in life, and social support while positively predicting psychological distress. Resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support negatively predicted psychological distress. Mediation analyses revealed significant indirect effects of fear of happiness on psychological distress through resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support. The findings suggest the importance of resilience, meaning in life, and social support as psychosocial factors in mitigating the adverse effects of fear of happiness on psychological health. These findings not only inform the design of targeted interventions aimed at reducing psychological distress but also highlight the value of strengthening internal and interpersonal resources to promote mental health, particularly in culturally relevant contexts.

Keywords Fear of happiness, Psychological distress, Resilience, Meaning in life, Perceived social support

Fear of happiness refers to the belief that experiencing happiness may result in negative consequences, such as misfortune or loss. This belief serves as a significant obstacle to achieving well-being¹⁻³. Grounded in culturally and individually shaped lay theories, fear of happiness reflects subjective beliefs about the desirability and risks of happiness, which influence emotional regulation and engagement with positive experiences^{4,5}. These lay theories frame happiness as fleeting, fragile, or even harmful, shaping behavioral responses that inhibit the benefits of positive emotions. This disruption is consistent with the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions⁶ which suggests that positive emotions expand cognitive and behavioral repertoires, enabling individuals to build enduring psychological resources such as resilience, meaning in life, and social support. However, individuals with a high fear of happiness often avoid positive emotions, narrowing their cognitive engagement and depleting resources critical for coping and well-being^{7,8}.

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The association between lay theories and the Broaden-and-Build Theory illustrates a cyclical relationship: beliefs about happiness shape emotional responses, which then influence the development or neglect of psychological resources^{9,10}. Fear of happiness fosters avoidance behaviors that prevent individuals from forming deep social bonds, pursuing meaningful goals, or experiencing emotional recovery. Over time, this cycle reinforces the initial belief that happiness is dangerous, amplifying vulnerability to distress. Intervening in this cycle requires more than fostering positive emotions; it demands reshaping maladaptive beliefs about happiness. Interventions aimed at challenging lay theories and promoting cognitive flexibility can help individuals re-engage with positive experiences¹¹. Additionally, activities aligned with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build principles, such as gratitude practices or collaborative efforts, could interrupt the cycle of resource depletion caused by fear of happiness^{8,12}.

Despite extensive research linking fear of happiness to poor psychological outcomes^{13,14} the mechanisms underlying these relationships remain underexplored. Resilience, meaning in life, and social support are recognized as protective factors against psychological distress, yet their mediating roles in the relationship between fear of happiness and distress have not been comprehensively studied^{2,7,12}. While Yildirim (2019)⁷ highlighted resilience's role in mediating fear of happiness on well-being, broader mediators, such as meaning in life and social support, remain insufficiently addressed. Findings from the Turkish context (Elmas & Çevik, 2024) emphasize the importance of cultural influences but lack an integrated framework that captures the relationship among these mediators in explaining psychological distress¹⁵.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how resilience, meaning in life, and social support mediate the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress. By integrating insights from the Broaden-and-Build Theory and cultural perspectives on lay theories, this research aims to deepen understanding of the cognitive and emotional pathways through which fear of happiness affects well-being. The findings will inform interventions targeting these mechanisms, offering strategies to mitigate the negative effects of fear of happiness on mental health.

Fear of happiness: A complex psychological phenomenon

Happiness is often regarded as a universal goal, yet beliefs and assumptions about it differ significantly among individuals¹⁶. As part of the broader construct of well-being, happiness is assessed through constructs like flourishing, subjective well-being, and psychological well-being^{17–24}. However, fear of happiness or cherophobia involves the avoidance of positive emotions based on the belief that happiness may lead to negative consequences²⁵. Rooted in ideas that happiness signals misfortune, fear of happiness manifests in thoughts like, “When I am happy, bad things will happen,” or “We laughed so much, something bad is bound to occur”^{26–29}. Cultural norms and individual experiences reinforce these beliefs, embedding avoidance behaviors into daily life^{26,30}.

Fear of happiness significantly impacts mental health, correlating with anxiety, depression, alexithymia, and reduced life satisfaction³¹. It erodes resilience, a critical resource for managing adversity, perpetuating cycles of avoidance and emotional vulnerability^{6,12}. Social well-being also suffers, as fear of happiness fosters withdrawal from relationships and weakens social support networks essential for psychological stability^{5,32}. In collectivist cultures, happiness is sometimes viewed as a source of conflict or envy, further isolating individuals³³. Cognitive distortions, including catastrophizing, play a central role in sustaining fear of happiness by reinforcing negative associations between happiness and misfortune^{26,29}. Such patterns undermine hope, reducing motivation and cognitive flexibility, and amplifying despair^{7,34}.

Addressing fear of happiness requires interventions targeting cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) challenges maladaptive beliefs and promotes healthier emotional patterns^{8,26}. Mindfulness-based strategies encourage present-moment awareness, mitigating avoidance behaviors^{5,6}. Social interventions, including gratitude practices and fostering supportive relationships, help counter the isolating effects of fear of happiness and normalize joy^{12,35}. By addressing these patterns, individuals can learn to embrace happiness as a vital component of a fulfilling life.

Fear of happiness predicts resilience, meaning in life, social support, and psychological distress

Fear of happiness, rooted in maladaptive lay theories, undermines individuals' capacity to engage with positive emotions, directly affecting psychological resources such as resilience, meaning in life, and social support. Research consistently demonstrates that fear of happiness fosters avoidance behaviors, hindering the development of emotional and social strengths necessary for well-being^{4,30,36}. Individuals who associate happiness with risk tend to avoid situations that elicit positive emotions, thereby limiting their ability to build resilience and adapt to adversity⁶. This avoidance behavior creates a cognitive and emotional deficit, as Yildirim (2019) found that fear of happiness is negatively associated with resilience, reducing psychological adaptability and strength⁷. Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (2001) provides a theoretical framework for understanding this dynamic⁶. Positive emotions are essential for expanding thought-action repertoires and building enduring resources like resilience. However, fear of happiness narrows these repertoires, leaving individuals vulnerable to stress and distress^{12,37}. Similarly, meaning in life, which offers coherence and purpose, is disrupted by fear of happiness. Belen et al. (2020) demonstrated that fear of happiness diminishes hope—an essential component of meaning in life—thereby impairing one's ability to pursue long-term goals and derive satisfaction from meaningful experiences⁸. Joshanloo (2018) further elaborated that individuals with a high fear of happiness often perceive happiness as fleeting or dangerous, leading to existential uncertainty and a lack of purpose, which exacerbates psychological vulnerability². Fear of happiness also negatively impacts social support by fostering withdrawal from interpersonal connections. Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) emphasized that individuals with a high fear of happiness are less likely to form or maintain supportive relationships, as they perceive social interactions involving happiness as potentially disruptive or risky¹². Cultural norms further amplify this dynamic, particularly

in collectivist societies where happiness is viewed as a threat to social harmony³³. As a result, fear of happiness not only erodes personal relationships but also limits access to external emotional resources, contributing to psychological distress.

By undermining resilience, meaning in life, and social support, fear of happiness deprives individuals of the tools needed to buffer against stress. This collective impact reinforces the fear of happiness's direct association with psychological distress, amplifying individuals' vulnerability to adverse mental health outcomes^{5,7}.

H1: Fear of happiness will have a negative relationship with resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support, and a positive relationship with psychological distress.

Resilience, meaning in life, and social support predict psychological distress

Resilience, meaning in life, and social support are well-established protective factors that mitigate psychological distress. Resilience acts as a buffer against stress by enabling individuals to adapt and recover from adversity⁶. Yildirim (2019) demonstrated that resilience mediates the relationship between fear of happiness and well-being, with greater resilience reducing vulnerability to distress⁷. Individuals with high resilience are better equipped to manage negative emotional states, even in the presence of maladaptive beliefs about happiness. Meaning in life also plays a crucial role in reducing psychological distress by providing individuals with existential grounding. Steger et al. (2006), as cited in Heintzelman et al. (2020), highlighted that individuals with a strong sense of purpose and coherence experience lower stress levels and greater emotional stability^{9,38}. In the context of fear of happiness, fostering meaning helps counteract the existential void created by avoidance behaviors. Belen et al. (2020) further demonstrated that hope—closely tied to meaning in life—mediates the impact of fear of happiness on flourishing, underscoring the critical role of purpose in mitigating distress⁸. Social support is another key resource that protects against psychological distress. Strong social networks offer emotional security and practical assistance, helping individuals manage stress more effectively^{5,12}. The stress-buffering model³² supports this, showing that social support reduces the effects of stress by providing relational and emotional stability. However, fear of happiness undermines this protective factor by discouraging social engagement, particularly in cultural contexts where happiness is seen as a source of envy or conflict³³. The absence of social support exacerbates psychological distress, leaving individuals without the relational resources needed to manage their emotional challenges.

Together, resilience, meaning in life, and social support form a robust triad that collectively reduces psychological distress. These resources not only counteract the effects of fear of happiness but also provide a comprehensive framework for emotional and cognitive recovery^{5,6}.

H2: Resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support will have negative relationships with psychological distress.

Resilience, meaning in life, and social support mediate the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress

The mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and social support explain how fear of happiness exerts its influence on psychological distress. Yildirim (2019) demonstrated that resilience partially mediates the relationship between fear of happiness and well-being outcomes, suggesting that individuals with greater resilience are less susceptible to the harmful effects of fear of happiness⁷. This aligns with the Broaden-and-Build Theory, which posits that positive emotions are necessary for building adaptive coping mechanisms. However, fear of happiness disrupts this process by narrowing emotional engagement and diminishing resilience over time^{6,8}. Similarly, meaning in life mediates the relationship between fear of happiness and distress by bridging the gap between avoidance behaviors and existential well-being. Belen et al. (2020) found that greater levels of hope, an important ingredient for meaning in life, help buffer against the negative impact of fear of happiness, supporting individuals in maintaining purpose and coherence despite maladaptive beliefs⁸. This finding underscores the importance of addressing cognitive and emotional pathways to mitigate the uncertainty associated with fear of happiness. Social support also serves as a critical mediator by providing relational stability and emotional assistance. While Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) did not directly test the mediation of social support in the fear of happiness-distress relationship, their findings suggest that diminished social connections amplify the psychological toll of fear of happiness¹². Cultural beliefs exacerbate this dynamic, as collectivist societies often associate happiness with potential social disruption, leading to withdrawal from relationships³³. This withdrawal limits access to external resources, intensifying the impact of fear of happiness on distress.

These interconnected mediators—resilience, meaning in life, and social support—provide a comprehensive explanation of how fear of happiness undermines psychological well-being. By highlighting critical pathways, they present important evidence for designing interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of fear of happiness on mental health^{5,7}.

H3: Resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support will mediate the association between fear of happiness and psychological distress.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 981 Turkish young adults. A total of 681 (69.4%) of the participants were female, and 300 (30.6%) were male. The mean age was 23.93 years ($SD = 6.69$). The majority of participants (759, 77.4%) reported average socioeconomic status, followed by below average (135, 13.8%) and above average (87, 8.9%). 243 participants (24.8%) were married, 726 participants (74.0%) were single, and 12 participants (1.2%) were widowed/divorced.

Measures

Fear of happiness

The Fear of Happiness Scale (Joshanloo, 2013) was used to assess individuals' aversion to experiencing happiness¹. The scale consists of five items rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item is: "Having lots of joy and fun causes bad things to happen." The scale was adapted to Turkish by Yildirim and Aziz (2017), who reported satisfactory psychometric properties³⁹. In this study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 was reported.

Psychological distress

The Psychological Distress Scale-6 (Kessler et al., 2002) was employed to measure levels of psychological distress⁴⁰. This scale comprises six items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time). A sample question is: "During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel nervous?" The scale was translated into Turkish by Altun et al. (2019), who demonstrated strong reliability and confirmed its single-factor structure⁴¹. In this study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 was found.

Meaning in life

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire – Short Form (MLQ-SF)⁴² derived from the original Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)³⁸ was utilized to evaluate perceptions of meaning in life. The MLQ-SF includes three items scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). A sample item is: "My life has a clear meaning or purpose." The Turkish adaptation was carried out by Demirbaş (2010), who confirmed the strong reliability and validity of the scale⁴³. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 was presented in this study.

Resilience

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), originally developed by Smith et al. (2008), is a 6-item self-report measure designed to assess an individual's capacity to recover from adversity, setbacks, and failures⁴⁴. The scale is unidimensional and uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item includes, "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times". The Turkish version of the BRS, adapted by Doğan (2015), has shown satisfactory reliability and validity⁴⁵. In the current study, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.74 was reported.

Perceived social support

Perceived social support was assessed using the Brief Perceived Social Support Questionnaire⁴⁶ a 6-item measure designed to evaluate individuals' perceived levels of social support. A sample item includes "I receive a lot of understanding and security from others," which is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 5 (very true). Higher scores indicate a greater perception of social support. The Turkish adaptation and validation of the scale were conducted by Yildirim and Tanriverdi (2021)⁴⁷. In the current study, the reliability of the scale was supported by a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81.

Procedures

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling through an online survey distributed on social media platforms. Informed consent was obtained before participants completed a series of standardized questionnaires hosted on the Google Forms platform. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no financial incentives were offered. The inclusion criteria were: being over 18 years of age, having full understanding of the Turkish language, and having access to the internet and social networking sites. Data were collected at a single time point, making the study cross-sectional in design. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University Scientific Research Ethics Committee, under reference number of E-95531838-050.99-118554.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics, skewness and kurtosis values, correlation and Cronbach alphas are shown in Table 1. Skewness values ranging between 0.45 and -0.93 and kurtosis values ranging between 0.79 and -0.87 showed that the assumption of normality was not violated. In correlation analysis, fear of happiness had a negative relationship with resilience ($r = -.27, p < .001$), meaning in life ($r = -.25, p < .001$), and perceived social support ($r = -.15, p < .001$), and a positive relationship with psychological distress ($r = .33, p < .001$). Resilience ($r = -.42, p < .001$), meaning in life ($r = -.37, p < .001$) and perceived social support ($r = -.28, p < .001$) had a negative relationship with psychological distress. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.90 for fear of happiness, 0.74 for resilience, 0.80 for meaning in life, 0.81 for perceived social support and 0.79 for psychological distress.

Mediation analysis

The results of the mediation analysis are shown in Table 2. The results showed that fear of happiness significantly predicted resilience ($\beta = -0.13, p < .001$), meaning in life ($\beta = -0.11, p < .001$), perceived social support ($\beta = -0.09, p < .001$) and psychological distress ($\beta = 0.09, p < .001$). Resilience ($\beta = -0.30, p < .001$), meaning in life ($\beta = -0.24, p < .001$) and perceived social support ($\beta = -0.14, p < .001$) significantly predicted psychological distress. Fear of happiness, resilience, meaning in life and perceived social support explained 31% of the variance in psychological distress.

The indirect, direct and total effects are shown in Table 3. Fear of happiness had a direct effect on psychological distress (effect = 0.09, [0.06, 0.11]), and an indirect effect through resilience (effect = 0.04, [0.02, 0.05]), meaning

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Correlation					α
					1	2	3	4	5	
1. Fear of happiness	16.13	8.93	0.45	-0.87	-					0.90
2. Resilience	18.57	4.36	-0.03	0.51	-0.27**	-				0.74
3. Meaning in life	15.98	3.87	-0.93	0.79	-0.25**	0.28**	-			0.80
4. Perceived social support	21.20	5.39	-0.51	-0.32	-0.15**	0.14**	0.23**	-		0.81
5. Psychological distress	18.18	4.55	0.32	-0.17	0.33**	-0.42**	-0.37**	-0.28**	-	0.79

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis, correlations and reliabilities. Note: M = mean, SD = standard deviations, ** $p < 0.001$.

in life (effect = 0.03, [0.01, 0.04]) and perceived social support (effect = 0.01, [0.01, 0.02]). The conceptual model with standardized coefficients is presented in Fig. 1.

Discussion

This study examined the mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and perceived social support in the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress, providing valuable evidence about the mechanisms underpinning these associations. The findings supported all three hypotheses, underscoring the significant role of psychological resources in mitigating the negative effects of fear of happiness on mental health. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how fear of happiness, as a maladaptive belief system, undermines well-being by disrupting essential psychological resources.

The first hypothesis (H1) posited that fear of happiness negatively predicts resilience, meaning in life, and social support while positively predicting psychological distress. This hypothesis was strongly supported by the data, revealing that individuals with high levels of fear of happiness exhibit diminished psychological resources and heightened distress. These findings align with prior research, demonstrating that maladaptive beliefs about happiness foster avoidance behaviors, thereby limiting the emotional and cognitive engagement necessary for developing adaptive coping strategies^{6,7}. Such avoidance behavior narrows individuals' ability to build resilience, making them more vulnerable to stress. Moreover, the negative relationship between fear of happiness and meaning in life highlights how fear of happiness disrupts existential grounding and coherence, which are critical for maintaining psychological stability. Similarly, social support was shown to be negatively affected by fear of happiness, as individuals who fear happiness are less likely to form or maintain supportive relationships, thereby further intensifying their vulnerability to distress¹². These findings emphasize that fear of happiness not only limits access to emotional and social resources but also exacerbates psychological distress through its direct and indirect effects on resilience, meaning in life, and social support.

The second hypothesis (H2), which proposed that resilience, meaning in life, and social support negatively predict psychological distress, was also confirmed. Resilience emerged as a key protective factor, buffering against distress by enabling individuals to adapt to adversity and recover from emotional setbacks⁶. This aligns with the Broaden-and-Build Theory, which suggests that positive emotions broaden cognitive repertoires and help individuals build enduring resources for emotional recovery. Meaning in life also played a pivotal role, as individuals with a strong sense of purpose and coherence reported lower levels of psychological distress. This finding resonates with Heintzelman et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of existential grounding in reducing stress⁹. Social support further mitigated distress by providing emotional security and practical assistance, as supported by the stress-buffering model³². Collectively, these resources form a triad that shields individuals from the detrimental effects of fear of happiness, demonstrating their interconnected roles in promoting psychological resilience.

The third hypothesis (H3) illuminated the mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and social support in the relationship between fear of happiness and psychological distress. The mediation analysis revealed that fear of happiness indirectly contributes to distress by undermining these resources. Resilience partially mediated this relationship, suggesting that individuals with greater resilience are better equipped to cope with the negative effects of fear of happiness⁷. Similarly, meaning in life mediated the relationship by bridging the gap between avoidance behaviors and existential well-being, underscoring the role of purpose in counteracting psychological distress⁸. Social support also served as a critical mediator, as diminished connections amplified the psychological toll of fear of happiness, particularly in cultural contexts where happiness is viewed as potentially disruptive to social harmony³³. Together, these mediators explained 31% of the variance in psychological distress, providing a comprehensive understanding of the pathways through which fear of happiness undermines mental health.

The theoretical integration of the Broaden-and-Build Theory and lay theories of happiness enriches the understanding of the fear of happiness. The Broaden-and-Build Theory posits that positive emotions expand thought-action repertoires and build enduring resources like resilience, meaning in life, and social support⁶. However, fear of happiness disrupts this process by fostering avoidance of positive emotional experiences, thereby depleting these essential resources. Lay theories of happiness further elucidate how beliefs about the desirability and risks of happiness influence these dynamics. For instance, individuals who view happiness as fleeting or risky are more likely to engage in avoidance behaviors, creating a cycle of resource depletion and distress^{2,5}. This association between cognitive beliefs and emotional processes highlights the complex mechanisms through which fear of happiness contributes to psychological distress.

Antecedent	Consequent																				
	M ₁ (Resilience)			M ₂ (Meaning in life)			M ₃ (Perceived social support)			Y (Psychological distress)											
	Coef.	SE	t	p	Coef.	SE	t	p	Coef.	SE	t	p									
X (Fear of happiness)	a ₁	-0.13	0	-8.79	0	a ₂	-0.11	0	-8.28	0	a ₃	-0.09	0	-4.82	0	c	0.09	0	6.36	0	
M ₁ (Resilience)		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		b ₁	-0.30	0	-10.4	0
M ₂ (Meaning in life)		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		b ₂	-0.24	0	-7.16	0
M ₃ (Perceived social support)		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-		b ₃	-0.14	0	-6.05	0
Constant	i _{M1}	20.7	0.3	74.7	0	i _{M2}	17.78	0.2	71.9	0	i _{M3}	22.69	0.4	64.5	0	i _y	29.3	0.9	33.56	0	
		R ² = 0.07				R ² = 0.06				R ² = 0.02				R ² = 0.31							
		F = 77.34; p < .001				F = 68.70; p < .001				F = 23.30; p < .001				F = 110.35; p < .001							

Table 2. Unstandardized coefficients for the mediation model. Note: X = independent variable, M = mediator variable, Y = dependent variable, Coef. = unstandardized coefficient, SE = standard error.

Path	Effect	SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Fear of happiness -> Resilience -> Psychological distress	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.05
Fear of happiness -> Meaning in life -> Psychological distress	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.04
Fear of happiness -> Perceived social support -> Psychological distress	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02
Total indirect effect	0.08	0.01	0.06	0.10
Direct effect	0.09	0.01	0.06	0.11
Total effect	0.17	0.01	0.14	0.20

Table 3. Summary of direct, indirect, and total effects observed in the mediation model. Note: Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5,000.

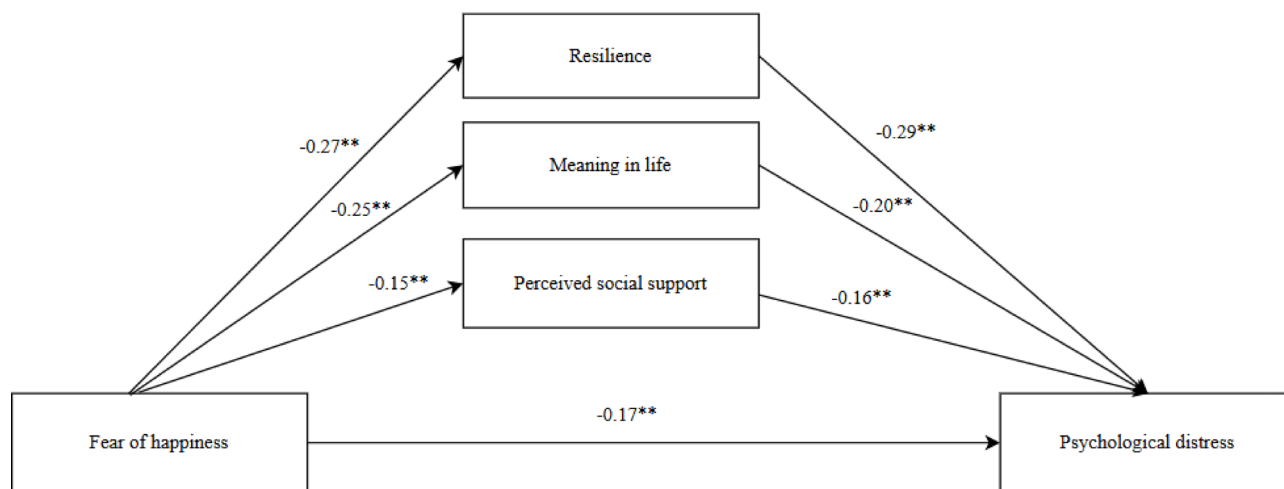


Fig. 1. Standardized coefficients of the mediation model.

By demonstrating the mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and social support, this study advances the theoretical and practical understanding of fear of happiness. These findings not only deepen the theoretical conversation around the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying fear of happiness but also inform the design of targeted interventions. Interventions that promote resilience, foster meaning in life, and strengthen social support networks are essential for breaking the cycle of avoidance and resource depletion caused by fear of happiness, ultimately reducing psychological distress and enhancing well-being.

Implications

The findings have significant practical implications for mental health interventions and policies. To mitigate the negative effects of fear of happiness, interventions should target both the cognitive and emotional mechanisms driving these relationships. Practical applications may include implementing structured programs, such as resilience-based building programs, meaning in life-based practices, or peer-led support groups, tailored to the Turkish context. In particular, cognitive-behavioural strategies that challenge maladaptive lay theories about happiness could promote cognitive flexibility and reduce avoidance behaviours. For example, resilience-building workshops and meaning in life-based practices could help individuals reframe their perceptions of happiness and engage more effectively with positive emotions. Furthermore, interventions should prioritize strengthening psychological resources. Programs aimed at fostering resilience through adaptive coping strategies, enhancing meaning in life through goal-directed activities, and building social support networks could collectively buffer against the adverse effects of fear of happiness. In collectivist cultures, where happiness may be viewed as socially disruptive, culturally tailored interventions are essential. These programs could focus on addressing the cultural norms that exacerbate fear of happiness, such as promoting the value of happiness as a shared and socially constructive experience.

Limitations and future directions

While this study provides important evidence for research and practice, several limitations should be addressed in future research. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between fear of happiness, psychological resources, and distress. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore the temporal dynamics of these relationships and determine causality. Additionally, the sample was predominantly composed of young adults, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other age groups. Future research should include diverse age cohorts to enhance the applicability of results. Finally, while the study focused on resilience,

meaning in life, and social support as mediators, other potential mechanisms, such as emotional regulation and coping strategies, warrant further exploration.

Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of fear of happiness by demonstrating its impact on psychological resources and distress. By highlighting the mediating roles of resilience, meaning in life, and social support, the findings provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying fear of happiness. These evidence offer a foundation for developing targeted interventions and emphasize the importance of cultural considerations in mitigating the adverse effects of fear of happiness on mental health. Future research should build on these findings to further elucidate the pathways through which fear of happiness influences well-being and to develop effective, culturally sensitive strategies for promoting resilience, meaning in life, and social support.

Data availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Author contributions

MY: Conceptualization, Resources, Validation, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft preparation, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Visualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. GGÖ: Formal analysis, Resources, Writing – original draft preparation; ŞA: Validation, Writing – original draft preparation. AMAA, IAA & JGS: Reviewing-editing, and Validation.

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Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethics statement

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The Ethics Committee of Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University has reviewed and approved this study (reference number: E-95531838-050.99-118554).

Informed consent

Consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Additional information

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