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## Do Career Decidedness and Career Distress Influence Psychological and Subjective Wellbeing? The Mediating Role of Mindfulness

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### Abstract

In this study, the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship of career decidedness and career distress with psychological wellbeing (PWB) and subjective wellbeing (SWB) was investigated. 338 university students (245 females and 93 males,  $M = 22.6$  years,  $SD = 5.25$ ) from Izmir, Turkey participated in the study. Career Decidedness Scale, Career Distress Scale, The Flourishing Scale, Positive and Negative Affect Scale, The Satisfaction with Life Scale and The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale were used in the study. The Pearson Correlation Test was applied for correlations and PROCESS Model 4 analysis tools were used to test the mediating models. The results showed that (a) career decidedness predicted mindfulness, PWB, and SWB, and (b) mindfulness played a mediating role in the link between career decidedness and PWB and SWB. While career distress predicted PWB and SWB, it did not predict mindfulness. In addition, mindfulness did not have a mediating role in the relationships of career distress with PWB and SWB.

**Key words:** Career Distress, Career Decidedness, Subjective Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing, Mindfulness

### Introduction

One's career is a constantly changing and developing structure in relation to their education, the expectations of the individual and their environment from life, their interpersonal relationships and future plans (Eryılmaz & Mutlu, 2017). Career choice is not only limited to work life; it is also a combination of roles one plays throughout their life (Super, 1980). Individuals experience many problems due to their personal characteristics, social values and career choices during their career development (Vondracek, 1998). Individuals who confront with these problems constantly strive to cope with many stressful and challenging factors and to adapt to the changes they encounter (Gati et al., 1996). It is seen that people who are successful in this process have high levels of wellbeing (Uthayakumar et al., 2010). People who have a high level of wellbeing and easily adapt to the changes in their career decision can also develop healthy ways of coping with problems encountered in different areas of life (Demirci et al., 2017). Mindfulness, which is effective in individuals' developing healthy coping skills, is defined as the individuals' focusing on everything that is happening at the moment with toleration, without judging themselves and the outside world, and it is one of the important factors that support wellbeing (Brown & Ryan, 2003). It is known that mindfulness-based exercises are used to assist career work (Galles et al., 2019; Zhang, 2011), and that wellbeing interacts with developments in the career field (Joo & Lee, 2017). Despite this, studies that examine the relationship between career processes affecting individuals' lives to this extent, and their wellbeing and mindfulness levels as a whole are limited.

### Career Decidedness and Career Distress

Career choice and decision are individuals' determination of current job opportunities and professions, the evaluation of whether these professions will meet their own expectations, and the decision on the most suitable one among the options (Doğan & Bacanlı, 2012; Sampson et al., 1992; Yeşilyaprak, 2011). During the process of career decision, individuals may have both cognitive and psychological difficulties, and so this situation causes them to feel tense and stressed and affects their psychological and physical wellbeing (Mann et al., 1989). Career decidedness, on the other hand, is a concept that can vary depending on individual and environmental factors such as individuals' personal characteristics, the culture they live in, their abilities and interests, and that indicates the commitment to the career decision they made and satisfaction with this decision

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(Miller, 2011; Gati et al., 1996). In other words, career decidedness is the level of confidence and certainty regarding a particular career decision (Gordon, 1998). However, individuals may feel uncomfortable in making a career decision, and avoid thinking about career and setting a career goal (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). Career distress is defined as feeling some uncomfortable affects during the career decision-making process and avoidance of determining a career; and this situation leads individuals to feel a series of negative affects (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015; Şensoy & Siyez, 2018). Due to career distress, individuals feel anxiety, depression, and various negative effects that may influence daily life (Larson et al., 1994). Furthermore, career distress is a concept that can be experienced in this process and includes feelings such as helplessness, depression, aimlessness, anxiety, guilt, and hopelessness that negatively affect university students (Şensoy & Siyez, 2018; Larson et al., 1994). Career distress is one of the most common sources of stress among university students, and 25% of the students who apply to psychological counseling departments in universities seek psychological help for this reason (Benton et al., 2003; Creed et al., 2016).

### **Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) and Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)**

One of the concepts associated with career choices in individuals' lives is wellbeing (Uthayakumar et al., 2010). The concept of wellbeing, which is frequently used together with such concepts as happiness, welfare, and virtue, has two separate and measurable sub-dimensions that are psychological wellbeing (PWB) and subjective wellbeing (SWB; Graham & Crown, 2014; Grant et al., 2009). PWB is described as the ability of the individual to fulfil their goals, to maintain their own development and to establish healthy relationships with people (Keyes et al., 2002). SWB, on the other hand, can simply be defined as a way of evaluating one's own life (Diener et al., 2009). Research has shown that SWB is associated with career indecision, difficulties in career decision-making, and career decision self-efficacy (Bacanlı, 2016; Uthayakumar et al., 2010). Career distress (Günay & Çelik, 2019) and career indecision (Viola et al., 2016) have been found to negatively affect PWB. In addition, conscious mindfulness exercises (Schutte & Malouff, 2011), which are known to be highly associated with SWB, are known to have beneficial effects for individuals including reducing anxiety during their career choices, improving problem solving skills, and enabling them to have less negative career thoughts (Galles et al., 2019).

### **Mindfulness as a Mediator**

Kabat-Zinn (2003) described one of most commented definitions of the mindfulness as 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment' (p. 145). The concept of mindfulness is defined as recognizing and accepting various affects that individuals feel without suppressing or trying to change them (Neff, 2003). Increasing mindfulness helps individuals be happier, more comfortable and conscious (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011), reduce depression symptoms (McCracken & Thompson, 2009), and develop and use healthier techniques to cope with stress (Weinstein et al., 2009). This study was conducted because it was thought that SWB and PWB of individuals would be positively affected by ensuring these developments in the process of making a career decision and continuing the career. It is known that mindfulness is associated with positive career thoughts, and the use of holistic career counseling interventions including mindfulness practices is recommended (Galles et al., 2019). In addition, mindfulness exercises can be taught to help individuals to cope with negative thoughts they feel due to their concerns for the future and career instability (Jacobs & Blustein, 2008). Also, it is known that individuals with high level of mindfulness experience fewer difficulties in career decision-making (Zhang, 2011). Thus, in addition to positive correlation with wellbeing, mindfulness also has positive effects on career developments of individuals (Galles et al., 2019; Zhang, 2011)

### **Purpose of the Study**

In order to fill the gap in the literature, it is important to study university students' career development and wellbeing. Also, investigating possible variables which may play a role in this relationship between career and wellbeing of university students is of great importance. Although studies reveal that awareness is related to both career-related thoughts (Galles et al., 2019; Zhang, 2011) and wellbeing (Bacanlı, 2016; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Uthayakumar et al., 2010), there is no study examining the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship with wellbeing. However, studies provide clues that mindfulness may have a significant mediating role in the relationship between career decidedness and career distress, and wellbeing. Therefore, this study was conducted to reveal in detail the relationships among career decidedness, career distress, wellbeing and mindfulness, which are stated to affect each other in previous studies, and also to contribute to the literature.

The four hypotheses in this study are as follows:

1. Mindfulness plays a mediating role in the relationship between career decidedness and SWB.
2. Mindfulness plays a mediating role in the relationship between career decidedness and PWB.
3. Mindfulness plays a mediating role in the relationship between career distress and SWB.
4. Mindfulness plays a mediating role in the relationship between career distress and PWB.

## Method

### Participants

In this study, data were collected from 338 university students (72.5% are female, 27.5% are male) studying in Izmir, whose ages ranged between 18 and 26 years ( $M = 22.6$  years,  $SD = 5.25$ ). The sample covers general background of university students in Turkey. The sample of the study was determined through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is one of the non-random sampling methods and defined as collecting data from a sample that the researcher can easily access (Büyüköztürk et al., 2019).

### Research Design

In order to use the data collection tools in the study, an ethical committee approval was obtained from Izmir Democracy University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2020/06.05). The scales and the Informed Consent Form (information on the voluntary principle, the purpose of the study, how the study will be conducted, how the participants' information will be kept confidential, and that the results will be used for educational purposes) were uploaded on Google Forms, where data can be collected online. The researchers emailed faculty members at the university twice with a three-week interval in between, with an invitation containing the purpose of the study and an invitation link to direct their students to this study.

### Assessment Tools

#### *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale*

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale developed by Brown and Ryan (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Özyeşil et al. (2011) is a unidimensional, 6-point Likert scale (1 = almost always and 6 = almost never) consisting of 15 items. As the scores obtained from the scale increase, the level of mindfulness increases as well. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 15, while the highest score is 90. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .82 in its original language (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and .80 in its Turkish adaptation (Özyeşil et al., 2011). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated in this study is .83.

#### *Career Distress Scale*

The Career Distress Scale is a 6-point Likert scale (1 = I totally disagree and 6 = I strongly agree) consisting of 9 items (Creed et al., 2016). The higher scores obtained from the scale indicate higher career distress. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions as "negative affects" and "perceived barriers". The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .90 in the original study, and in the Turkish adaptation, it is .81 (Şensoy & Siyez, 2018). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated in this study is .84.

#### *Career Decidedness Scale*

The Career Decidedness Scale is a five-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree and 5 = I strongly agree), consisting of 6 items and one dimension, developed by Lounsbury et al. (1999) and adapted into Turkish by Akçakanat and Uzunbacak (2019). As the scores obtained from the scale increase, the level of individuals' career decidedness also increases. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .95 in its original language (Lounsbury et al., 1999), and .80 in its Turkish adaptation (Akçakanat & Uzunbacak, 2019). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated in this study is .80.

#### *The Flourishing Scale*

The Flourishing Scale (TFS) was developed by Diener et al. (2009) to measure PWB. Telef (2013) adapted TFS into Turkish. TFS consists of 8 items and one dimension. The scale is a 7-point Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree and 7 = I strongly agree), and it can be used to interpret that the individual has many psychological

resources and strengths with the increase in the score obtained from the scale. The lowest score to be obtained from the scale is 8, while the highest score is 56. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .87 in its original language (Diener et al., 2009), and .80 in its Turkish adaptation (Telef, 2013). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated in this study is .83.

#### *The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)*

Positive-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988) and adapted into Turkish by Gençöz (2000) is a 5-point Likert scale consisting of 20 affective items, 10 of which are positive and 10 negative. Separate calculations are made for positive and negative affects in the scale. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .88 for positive affects and .85 for negative affects in its original language (Watson et al., 1988). In the adaptation study of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were .86 for positive affects and .83 for negative affects (Gençöz, 2000). In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha values are .87 for positive affects and .83 for negative affects.

#### *The Satisfaction with Life Scale*

The Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Köker (1991) is a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Not at all suitable and 7 = Very suitable) and consists of 5 items in total. The lowest score that can be obtained in the scale is 5 while the highest score is 35. The higher scores obtained from the scale indicate higher life satisfaction. The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .84 in the Turkish adaptation (Köker, 1991). The Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient calculated in this study is .82.

### **Data Analysis**

All variables to be measured in the study, except for SWB, are measured with one scale. The Satisfaction with Life Scale and PANAS were used together to measure SWB. In this study, SWB was calculated by taking the total score over the model proposed by Busseri and Sadava (2011) with the concept of "Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) as a Composite" (p. 296), which positive emotions affect life satisfaction positively (+) and negative emotions negatively (-). The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationships between career distress, career decision-making, mindfulness, PWB, and SWB. The scores of skewness and kurtosis coefficients of all scales were measured between +1 and -1, which shows measure normality assumptions. Lastly, PROCESS Macro Model 4 with 5,000 bootstraps (Hayes, 2017) was used for testing the mediating role to examine four hypothesis models. PROCESS is a tool that can calculate the effect of observed variable path analysis based on mediator and moderator variables (Hayes, 2017). At the same time, it can create direct and indirect effects with single or multiple intermediaries in models using mediator variables (Hayes, 2017).

### **Findings**

The validity of the scales, their correlations with each other, and the mediating role indicated in the hypotheses were analysed respectively. First, as stated in the method section, the Cronbach's Alpha values of the scales used in the study were at a valid level. Second, the correlation results showed that career decidedness had (a) a significant, low-level positive relationship with mindfulness ( $r = .190, p < .001$ ), (b) a significant, moderate-level positive relationship with PWB ( $r = .416, p < .001$ ), and (c) a significant, moderate-level positive relationship with SWB ( $r = .437, p < .001$ ). Another correlation result/other correlation results showed that career distress had (a) a significant and low-level negative relationship with PWB ( $r = -.240, p < .001$ ), (b) a significant and low level negative relationship with SWB ( $r = -.291, p < .001$ ), and non-significant relationship with mindfulness ( $r = .66$ ). Third, mindfulness and PWB ( $r = .319, p < .001$ ) and mindfulness and SWB ( $r = .369, p < .001$ ) showed a significant and moderate-level positive relationship. Lastly, the relationship between PWB and SWB ( $r = .517, p < .001$ ) was statistically significant and moderately positive.

Table 1. Bivariate correlations

	CDE	CDS	PWB	SWB	MIND
CDE	-	-	-	-	-
CDS	-.518*	-	-	-	-

PWB	.416*	-.240*	-	-	-
SWB	.437*	-.291*	.517*	-	-
MIND	.190*	.066	.319*	.362*	-
M	21.65	34.19	42.65	27.17	57.04
SD	4.18	5.92	6.51	14.54	10.39
Skewness	-.05	.08	-1.01	-.39	.04
Kurtosis	.91	.63	1.12	.57	.07

Note: CDE: Career Decidedness, CDS: Career Distress, SWB: Subjective Wellbeing, PWB: Psychological Wellbeing, MIND: Mindfulness, M: Mean, SD: Standard Deviation, \* p < 0.001

This study has four hypothesis models. In the first and second hypotheses, the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship of career decidedness with PWB and SWB were tested. In the third and fourth hypotheses, the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship of career distress with PWB and SWB were tested. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show the outcomes of the hypothesis models.

The results of Hypothesis 1 and 2 showed that career decidedness predicted mindfulness ( $a_i = .4769$ ,  $p < .001$ ), PWB ( $c' = .5789$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SWB ( $c'' = 1.3382$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly and positively (Fig. 1). Also, mindfulness predicted PWB ( $b_i = .1561$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SWB ( $b_{ii} = .4046$ ,  $p < .001$ ) positively and significantly. In PWB, the mediating role of mindfulness was .0745 (LLCI = .0247 - ULCI = .1358), and the total mediating role of career decidedness and mindfulness was .6533 (LLCI = .5002 - ULCI = .8065). In SWB, the mediating role of mindfulness was .1929 (LLCI = .0639 - ULCI = .3586), and the total mediating role of career decidedness and mindfulness was calculated as 1.5312 (LLCI = 1.1928 - ULCI = 1.8696). As the p-value of both predictive effects were lower than .05 and there was no zero value between the LLCI and ULCI values of the mediating roles, these values were significant (Hayes, 2017).

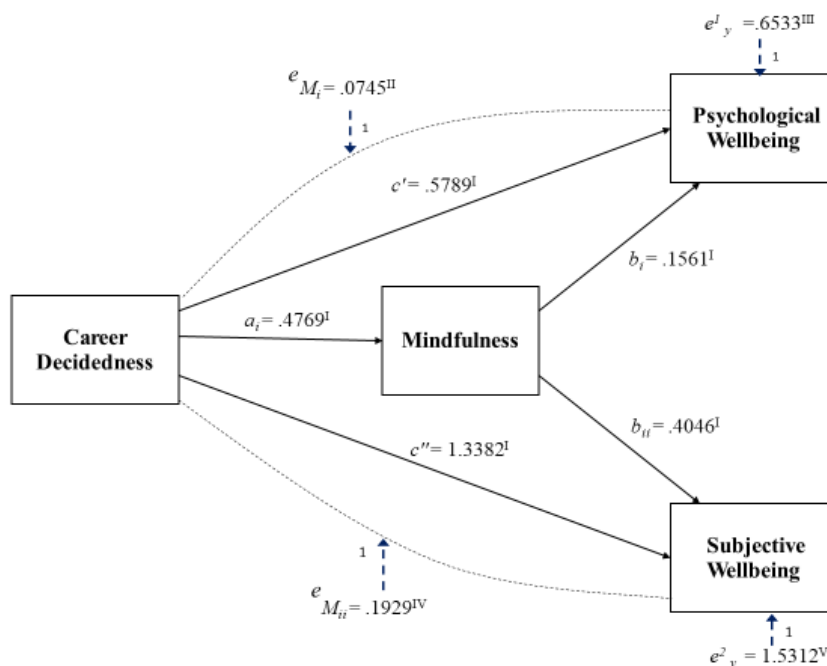


Figure 1. <sup>I</sup>p < .001; <sup>II</sup>LLCI = .0247-ULCI = .1358; <sup>III</sup>LLCI = .5002-ULCI = .8065; <sup>IV</sup>LLCI = .0247-ULCI = .1358; <sup>V</sup>LLCI = .5002-ULCI = .8065

The results of Hypothesis 3 and 4 showed that career distress predicted PWB ( $c' = -.2888$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SWB ( $c'' = -.7760$ ,  $p < .001$ ) negatively and significantly (Fig. 2). Mindfulness predicted PWB ( $b_i = .2111$ ,  $p < .001$ )

and SWB ( $b_{ii} = .5357$ ,  $p < .001$ ) positively and significantly. However, career distress did not significantly predict mindfulness ( $a_i = .1164$ ). In the relationship between career distress and PWB (LLCI =  $-.0152$  - ULCI =  $.0675$ ) and SWB (LLCI =  $-.0379$  - ULCI =  $.1658$ ), the mediating role of mindfulness was not significant since it had a zero value between LLCI and ULCI values (Hayes, 2017).

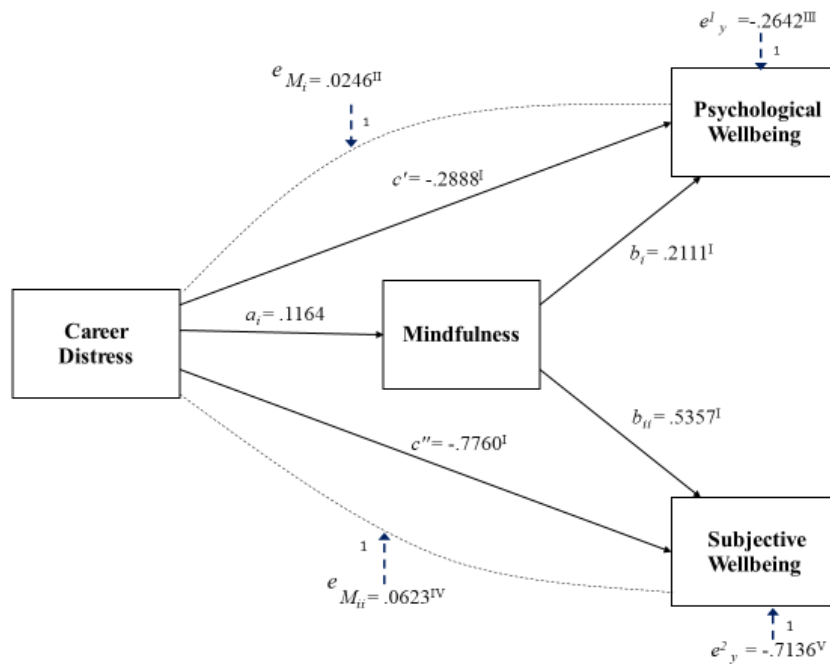


Figure 2. <sup>I</sup> $p < .001$ ; <sup>II</sup>LLCI =  $-.0152$ -ULCI =  $.0675$ ; <sup>III</sup>LLCI =  $-.3787$ -ULCI =  $-.1497$ .; <sup>IV</sup>LLCI =  $-.0379$ -ULCI =  $.1658$ ; <sup>V</sup>LLCI =  $.9657$ -ULCI =  $.4616$

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between career thoughts and wellbeing, and the mediating role of mindfulness in these relationships. The results of the correlation analysis showed that there was a negative relationship between career distress, PWB and SWB; a positive relationship between career decidedness, PWB and SWB; and a positive relationship between career decidedness and mindfulness. In the mediating role analyses, it was seen that (a) career decidedness positively predicted mindfulness, PWB and SWB, (b) mindfulness played a significant mediating role between career decidedness and PWB, and (c) mindfulness played a mediating role between career decidedness and SWB. In addition, the mediating role analyses performed with career distress showed that (a) career distress negatively predicted PWB and SWB, (b) career distress did not predict mindfulness significantly, and (c) mindfulness did not play a mediating role between career distress, and PWB and SWB.

The findings of negative prediction of career distress on wellbeing support the literature. It was found that individuals who did not have career difficulties or who could cope well with this situation made their career choices comfortably and competently (Yavuz, 2006). The negative relationship between career distress and career decidedness overlaps with Yavuz's (2006) study. At the same time, individuals who have career decidedness feel more secure, and individuals' career decidedness predicts their SWB (Uthayakumar et al., 2010). The findings of this study showed that career decidedness positively predicts not only SWB but also PWB.

This study showed that career decidedness predicted mindfulness positively and significantly. Career decidedness is a process that requires individuals to know themselves very well and to have high awareness of their interests, abilities, skills and values (Doğan & Bacanlı, 2012; Yeşilyaprak, 2011); and mindfulness is defined as the fact that individuals have the skills to focus on the moment they are in, thus making them happier and more comfortable and develop healthier strategies to cope with stressful situations (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Özyeşil et al., 2011; Ülev, 2014; Weinstein et al., 2009). It is also known that individuals with high levels of mindfulness experience less difficulty when making a career decision than the individuals with low levels of mindfulness (Zhang, 2011). One of the findings of this study, i.e., 'career decidedness positively predicts mindfulness', is supported by other studies in the literature (Dobkin & Hutchinson, 2013; Jacobs &

Blustein, 2008). Individuals with high level of career decidedness are able to be mindful of the current moment and to give attention to possible options.

On the other hand, the prediction of mindfulness by career distress was not statistically significant. Career distress is a concept that includes negative affects experienced by individuals while making a decision about their future (Creed & Gagliardi, 2015). While mindfulness focuses on the present moment (Özyeşil et al., 2011), career distress points at the future and the plans for the future (Şensoy & Siyez, 2018). At the same time, mindfulness requires a full focus on both positive and negative experiences and affects by developing acceptance (Cash & Whittingham, 2010). Career distress is a process that ends with individual's making a career decision and developing career decidedness (Larson et al., 1994). For these reasons, the predictive relationship between these two variables may have turned out to be insignificant due to their focus on different time periods. From another point of view, mindfulness includes accepting and embracing all positive and negative experiences, while career distress is a part of a process that the individual aims to escape from all negative affects and puts an end to these negative affects.

### **The Mediating Role of Mindfulness**

Although the relationship between career and mindfulness has been studied in the literature, there are no studies revealing the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between career decidedness and PWB and SWB. With this research, it has been found out that (a) career decidedness predicts mindfulness, PWB and SWB, and (b) mindfulness plays a mediating role in the relationship between (a) career decidedness and PWB, and (b) career decidedness and SWB. Mindfulness affects career decidedness positively and significantly, and when the career decidedness and mindfulness of university students increase, both their PWB and SWB increase as well. Considering the findings of this study, it can be said that mindfulness has a positive effect on the wellbeing of university students. In a period when career decisions and choices are questioned, focusing on the moment increases students' PWB and SWB. This is because university students experience many negative affects and situations such as depression, unhappiness, hopelessness and anxiety due to being concerned for the future, job opportunities and trying to make the right decision, and whether the major they choose will respond to their interests and abilities (Doğan & Bacanlı, 2012). However, mindfulness does not involve focusing on the past and the future, but gently bringing the mind to the present moment and accepting some negative affects that may be experienced without judging them (Özyeşil, 2011). For this reason, it is seen that the wellbeing of the university students who move away from their future anxiety, fulfil the needs of the moment and think about the past less is high, as this study shows. Previous research confirms that individuals with high levels of mindfulness lead a more comfortable and conscious life, which is known to contribute to the individual's wellbeing (Brown & Ryan, 2009). The mediating role of mindfulness revealed by this research has also been identified as a factor that increases the wellbeing of university students in the career decision-making process, where they may experience negative affects such as anxiety and hopelessness. In sum, students with high career decidedness have higher PWB and SWB if they are mindful.

### **Conclusion**

This initiate study in the field of career counseling investigates both PWB and SWB at the same time and contains results regarding the individuals' career situations. Career distress has a negative effect and career decidedness has a positive effect on both PWB and SWB. Importantly, it also found that mindfulness can play an important role in practices that will increase wellbeing. Mindfulness is a factor that positively affects PWB and SWB of individuals. Lastly, this study provides evidences that mindfulness can mediate effect positively on the relationship between career decidedness and wellbeing.

### **Contribution of the Study to the Field, Limitations and Recommendations**

The positive relationship between mindfulness and career decidedness, which is one of the results of this study, proves that the addition of mindfulness exercises to intervention programs (Talib et al., 2015) of the psychological counseling service received by students in the field of career counseling will be beneficial. As this study was carried out with university students in a city in Turkey, its effect value is limited to university students. Conducting similar qualitative or quantitative studies with participants who are already working, seeking a job, or having problems with their career may contribute to studies on the effect of career distress and career decidedness on PWB and SWB.



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