# THE ROLE OF MEANING IN LIFE AND HOPE IN PREDICTING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AFTER TRAUMATIC LIFE EXPERIENCES

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**Abstract**

In the current study, the extent to which meaning in life and hope predict the psychological well-being levels of earthquake victims was investigated. The relational survey model was used to investigate the relationships. The study group is comprised of 244 individuals over the age of 18 who have experienced the February 6, Kahramanmaraş-based earthquake. Participants were selected using the convenience sampling method. The participants were reached through Google Forms application. The "Psychological Well-Being Scale", "Meaning in Life Scale" and "Dispositional Hope Scale" were employed in data collection. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of meaning in life and hope on psychological well-being. Findings showed that meaning in life and hope significantly predicted the psychological well-being of the participants. Meaning in life and hope together explained 65.10% of the variance in participants' psychological well-being scores. Thus, higher levels of meaning in life and hope are correlated with improved psychological well-being. The results obtained were discussed within the framework of the relevant literature and recommendations were made for researchers and practitioners

**Keywords:** Trauma, psychological well-being, meaning in life, hope.

## INTRODUCTION

Earthquakes are an inevitable reality in countries like Turkey, which are located on active fault lines. Our country has been subjected to various devastating earthquakes throughout history. Our country most recently experienced earthquakes on February 6, 2023 centred in Pazarcık and Elbistan (Kahramanmaraş). These earthquakes caused significant loss of life and property in 11 provinces. After trauma, individuals may face psychosocial challenges such as difficulties in social relationships, impaired sense of trust, social isolation and loneliness (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008). Similarly, Diener, Oishi and Tay (2018) stated that traumatic experiences negatively affect individuals' emotional well-being, leading to weakened social relationships and reduced life satisfaction by increasing stress and anxiety levels. According to Hefferon and Boniwell (2011), traumatic life events ranging from wars and violence to migration, accidents, natural disasters and famine are an inevitable part of the human experience and have a direct impact on individual development and well-being. In this context, it can be stated that traumatic experiences may be among the factors negatively affecting the psychological well-being of trauma victims.

Psychological well-being is defined as a person's mental and emotional health, life satisfaction, and ability to lead a meaningful life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Psychological well-being is not limited to momentary emotional states; it is also related to an individual's capacity to form social connections and lead a meaningful life (Seligman, 2011). Psychological well-being is a multidimensional concept which encompasses individuals' mental, emotional and social health (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Ryff (1989) explained psychological well-being through six key dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, purposeful life, environmental control and personal growth. Self-acceptance is related to an individual's ability to accept both his/her positive and negative aspects; positive relationships involve the capacity to form close and secure social connections; autonomy refers to the ability to think independently and make decisions; purposeful life means having goals that give meaning to one's life; environmental control is the ability to adapt to the environment and manage environmental conditions and personal growth refers to the desire to develop through new experiences and enhance one's potential. According to Huppert (2009), psychological well-being refers to an individual's ability to feel good about himself/herself and maintain his/her functionality effectively. This process does not always involve a constant state of well-being and happiness; on the contrary, painful experiences are also considered a natural part of psychological well-being. Therefore, these types of experiences need to be effectively managed over time. According to Telef (2013), psychological well-being is closely associated with an individual's ability to express his/her potential in order to lead a meaningful life, despite the various challenges encountered in life. In this regard, the psychological well-being of each individual is essential for mental health (Gönültaş & Karataş, 2023). Diener et al. (1999) state that individuals having high psychological well-being experience lower stress, develop stronger social relationships and have higher overall life satisfaction. In conclusion, it can be said that psychological well-being is an important construct in terms of an individual's effective use of internal resources and his/her ability to live in harmony with his/her environment. In this connection, the investigation of the factors that affect psychological well-being was considered to be a necessity.

One of the variables examined in the study in relation to psychological well-being is meaning in life. Meaning in life is defined as the individual's effort to make sense of his/her existence and the process of attributing purpose to his/her life (Frankl, 1992). Meaning in life is related to a sense of value and the individual's perception of his/her life as meaningful and worth living (Martela & Steger, 2016). Steger (2012) argues that meaning in life allows individuals to structure the events in their life, the relationships they form and their future expectations within a specific framework. Steger et al. (2006) approached meaning in life as a two-dimensional construct and these two dimensions are the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. The presence of meaning refers to how meaningful an individual perceives his/her life to be and is related to assessing whether there is a specific purpose,

goal or value in his/her life. The search for meaning refers to an individual's effort to give meaning to his/her life and the quest he/she undertakes in this regard. George and Park (2016) consider meaning in life within the framework of three essential components. The coherence component refers to an individual's ability to interpret his/her experiences in a logical and systematic manner. The purpose component involves an individual's setting goals for the future and these goals taking on a guiding role in his/her life. The importance component involves an individual' perceiving himself/herself and his/her life as valuable and meaningful. Frankl (1992) suggests that even when a person faces inevitable suffering, he/she can find meaning by overcoming this pain and transform this process into a success for humanity. Research suggests that meaning in life acts as a factor protective against poor psychological health (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011; Masten & Reed, 2002). According to Park (2010), individuals can develop their coping skills with difficult situations by assigning meaning to their experiences after traumatic or stressful events, thus strengthening their emotional well-being and psychological resilience. Krok (2015) states that meaning in life is a fundamental component of psychological well-being and that individuals use their systems of meaning as a tool in the process of coping with life's challenges and difficulties. In this regard, it can be stated that the sense of meaning in life is a fundamental element in the preservation and improvement of mental health.

Another variable examined in the study in relation to psychological well-being is the concept of hope. Hope is defined as an individual's belief that he/she can achieve positive outcomes in the future and the motivation to make active efforts to reach these goals (Snyder, 1994). Stephenson (1991) conceptualizes hope as a dynamic process involving cognitive, affective and behavioural components, all directed towards the anticipation of a positive future. According to Snyder (2002), hope is a goal-oriented mindset that involves individuals' perception of their ability to generate pathways to achieve desired goals, initiate these pathways into action and use them when necessary. Individuals with high levels of hope view their past challenges as a valuable source of information, both about themselves and the obstacles they may encounter in the future. In this regard, while coping with the challenges they face in the process of achieving their desired goals, they can use their past experiences to develop alternative solutions (Snyder et al., 2000). In situations of future pessimism and adversity, hope, which represents a strong belief in the possibility of positive developments, contributes to an individual's resilience – their ability to find meaning and persevere despite obstacles (Snyder et al., 2002). Hope can act as a buffer against potential negative impacts (Padilla-Walker, Hardy & Christensen, 2010). Aspinwall and Leaf (2002) emphasize that hope is strongly associated with positive emotions. Individuals with high levels of hope can maintain their positive emotions despite the difficulties they face. Tarhan and Bacanlı (2015) argue that hope functions as a protective factor that helps individuals survive and supports their well-being. It is stated that, especially in trauma survivors, the sense of hope strengthens psychological resilience and contributes to their readjustment (Hobfoll et al., 2007). In this context, hope, which contributes to the development of positive expectations about the future, can be considered an important psychological resource that facilitates coping with stress.

Traumatic experiences such as earthquakes can negatively affect individuals' psychological well-being and can cause mental health issues including stress, anxiety and depression. In this regard, identifying the factors that support psychological well-being can enhance individuals' capacity to cope with traumatic experiences and contribute to a healthier recovery process. In addition, it is anticipated that the findings obtained from the study will provide ideas for mental health professionals and policymakers in developing appropriate interventions. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the influence of meaning in life and hope on individuals' psychological well-being after the catastrophic earthquakes that impacted 11 provinces across Turkey on February 6, 2023. To this end, the study sought to answer the question, "Do meaning in life and hope play a role in predicting the psychological well-being of earthquake survivors?"

# METHOD

## Research Model
The study utilized a relational model to examine how meaning in life and hope predict psychological well-being. The relational model aims to determine whether two or more variables change simultaneously and to assess the level of this change (Karasar, 2012).

## Study Group
The study group consists of 244 individuals who experienced the February 6th, Kahramanmaraş-centred earthquake and are over 18 years old. While 52% (127) of the participants are female and 48% (117) are male. While 28.3% (69) of the participants are single, 71.7% (175) are married. Moreover, 32% of the participants (78) experienced the earthquake in Adana, 15.2% (37) in Adıyaman, 11.5% (28) in Gaziantep, 16.8% (41) in Hatay, 12.3% (30) in Kahramanmaraş and 12.3% (30) in Malatya. In forming the study group, the convenience sampling method was used. This sampling method is based on researchers selecting participants starting from those who are most easily available until they reach the required sample size (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2016).

## Data Collection Tools
### Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS)
Telef (2013) adapted and validated the scale originally developed by Diener et al. (2010) for use among Turkish-speaking populations. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a total explained variance of 42%, with factor loadings for the items ranging between .54 and .76. Confirmatory factor analysis produced the following fit indices: RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.04, GFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.94, RFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.95 and IFI = 0.95. The scale demonstrated strong test-retest reliability, as evidenced by a high, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the first and second administrations (r = 0.86, p < .001). The scale consists of 8 items, measured using a 7-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 8 to 56. Higher scores on the scale reflect a greater abundance of psychological resources and strengths. The internal consistency reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .80 in the original validation study. In the current study, the scale showed even higher internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .88, indicating excellent reliability.

### Meaning in Life Scale (MLS)
The Turkish adaptation of the scale originally developed by Steger et al. (2006) was carried out by Demirbaş (2010). Factor analysis results showed factor loadings ranging from .59 to .75, and consistent with the original scale, a two-factor structure was identified. The scale comprises 10 items, organized into two sub-dimensions: 'Presence of Meaning in Life' and 'Search for Meaning in Life.' Scores on the scale range from 7 to 70, with higher scores indicating a greater sense of meaning in life for the individual. The scale's internal consistency reliability, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .86. In the current study, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .81.

### Dispositional Hope Scale (THS)
Tarhan and Bacanlı (2015) adapted the scale developed by Snyder et al. (1991) into Turkish. Measured on an 8-point Likert scale, the scale consists of 12 items. Four filler items are included in the scale but are not considered when calculating the final scale score. The scale is structured into two sub-dimensions: "Agentic Thinking" and "Alternative Pathways Thinking". The score range for each sub-dimension is 4 to 32, and the total scale score range is 8 to 64. An increase in scale scores corresponds to an increase in the individual's level of hope. Both the original scale and the current study demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas of .84 and .89, respectively.

## Data Collection

Prior to data collection, email permission was obtained from the researchers who developed the scales used in the study. A personal information form used to gather demographic data from participants, along with other data collection tools, was converted into an online form via the Google Forms application. The online forms were made available to the participants through various social network groups. The form provided participants with crucial information, including the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidential use of research data, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

## Data Analysis

Before proceeding with the analysis, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of all variables were assessed to evaluate the normality of the data distribution. The results showed that the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables were within the acceptable range of -1.00 to +1.00, confirming that the data met the normality assumption (Çokluk, Şekercioğlu, & Büyüköztürk 2014). In order to meet the assumptions required for regression analysis, the error terms in the model must be independent of each other. In this context, the Durbin-Watson value used to determine autocorrelation was calculated to be 1.574. An expected value between 1.50 and 2.50 indicates that there is no autocorrelation in the model and that the regression assumption is met (Kalaycı, 2006). In addition, pair-wise correlations between variables were examined to assess the presence of multicollinearity in the dataset. The analysis revealed that all pair-wise correlations between variables were less than .90, suggesting the absence of multicollinearity in the dataset (Çokluk et al., 2014). The relationships between psychological well-being, meaning in life, and hope were examined using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. Multiple linear regression was used to investigate the predictive relationship between meaning in life, hope, and psychological well-being. All analyses were conducted in SPSS 22.0, and a significance level of .05 was adopted

## RESULTS

This section begins with the presentation of descriptive statistics for all study variables in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the variables

| Variables | N | Mean | Min. | Max. | S | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological well-being | 244 | 44.52 | 21.00 | 56.00 | 8.13 | -.970 | .319 |
| Meaning in life | 244 | 48.27 | 23.00 | 70.00 | 11.94 | .243 | -.847 |
| Hope | 244 | 50.35 | 24.00 | 64.00 | 9.53 | -.777 | -.036 |

Examination of Table 1 reveals that skewness and kurtosis values for all variables (psychological well-being, meaning in life, and hope) fall within the range of -1.00 to +1.00. These findings show that the data are normally distributed (Çokluk et al., 2014).

To determine the correlations between the participants' psychological well-being scores and their meaning in life and hope scores, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was run and Table 2 presents the findings.

**Table 2**. Pair-wise correlation values for the variables

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological well-being | 1 | .489[**] | .787[**] |
| Meaning in life | | 1 | .409[**] |
| Hope | | | 1 |

[**]p< .01

Table 2 reveals significant positive correlations between the participants' psychological well-being and both meaning in life (r = .489, p < .01) and hope (r = .787, p < .01).

When the correlation coefficients are examined, it can be seen that a medium correlation ($.30 < r <$ $.70$) exists between the participants' psychological well-being scores and their meaning in life and hope scores (Büyüköztürk, 2014). The finding supports the notion that increased meaning in life and hope contribute to enhanced psychological well-being.

After the correlation analysis, multiple linear regression was used to examine how meaning in life and hope predict participants' psychological well-being and Table 3 shows the findings.

**Table 3.** Findings on the prediction of psychological well-being by meaning in life and hope

| Predictor Variable | B | Standard Error | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | 7.639 | 1.774 | | 4.306 | .000** |
| Meaning in life | .137 | .028 | .201 | 4.833 | .000** |
| Hope | .601 | .035 | .705 | 16.980 | .000** |
| R= .808 R2= .651 F= 227.402 sd= 2/241 p= .000 Durbin Watson= 1.574 | | | | | |

**p< .01

An examination of Table 3 reveals that the variables of meaning in life and hope are statistically significant predictors of participants' psychological well-being, and the regression model developed in this analysis is also statistically significant [R= .808, R2= .651, $F_{(2-241)}$= 227.402, p< .01]. The combined effect of meaning in life and hope accounts for 65.10% of the variance in participants' psychological well-being. T-test results (Table 3) show that both meaning in life (t = 4.833, p < .01) and hope (t = 16.980, p < .01) significantly and positively predict the participants' psychological well-being. The standardized regression coefficients (β) reveal that hope (.705) has a stronger relative influence on psychological well-being compared to meaning in life (.201). Collectively, these findings suggest that increased levels of meaning in life and hope are correlated with enhanced psychological well-being.

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The study findings demonstrate that meaning in life and hope are significant predictors of participants' psychological well-being. This study's findings are consistent with prior research that has established a link between meaning in life and psychological well-being. The study conducted by Karaçalı and Korkmaz (2023) concluded that meaning in life significantly predicts psychological well-being, and that an increase in participants' levels of meaning in life also increases their psychological well-being. Similarly, Aytekin and Sakal (2021) stated that meaning in life has a positive and significant influence on individuals' perceptions of psychological well-being. In addition, García-Alandete (2015) revealed a significant relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being, and that the experience of meaning in life is important for psychological well-being. The pursuit of meaning in the face of life's challenges significantly influences individual psychological well-being and shapes effective coping strategies (Frankl, 1992). According to Steger (2012), the basic components of meaning in life, such as the feeling that life is important, having a sense of purpose and the individual's ability to make sense of himself/herself and his/her life, have a direct impact on psychological well-being. This perception is expected to increase life satisfaction and positively affect the individual's emotions (Şahin, Aydın, Sarı, Kaya, & Pala, 2012). The existence of meaning in life is an effective factor in increasing the resilience of individuals in the face of psychological distress or mental disorders (Başarıkan & Seki, 2023). Individuals who find meaning in life are more resilient to stress and traumatic experiences (Park, 2010)

Another finding of the study is that hope significantly predicts psychological well-being. In a similar way, Yan, Zakaria, Akhir and Hassan (2024) found that hope contributes significantly to psychological well-being. Furthermore, Al Eid, Arnout, Alqahtani and Fadhel (2021) conducted a study on individuals who recovered from COVID-19 infection and determined that hope has a direct

and positive impact on psychological well-being. Imiroğlu, Demir and Murat (2021) argue that hope is positively correlated with psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals with high levels of hope tend to be more intrinsically motivated, a willingness to explore alternative strategies to achieve goals, a positive outlook on the future, enhanced coping mechanisms and increased goal-directed behaviour. Hope can play an effective role in the individual's coping with stress and can serve an encouraging function as a motivational source towards achieving goals (Alidina & Tettero, 2010). According to Aspinwall and Leaf (2002), hope can be an important protective factor in the face of challenging situations such as illness, loss or stressful life events. Individuals with high levels of hope exert more effort to overcome the difficulties they encounter and maintain their psychological resilience in the process. Özhan and Atalay (2022) stated that encouraging the development of hope is an important element in the process of increasing the psychological well-being of individuals and becoming happier. In addition, it has been emphasized that hope supports protective characteristics in individuals such as self-confidence, belief in coping with difficulties, being cognitively flexible, developing a positive perspective and a strong commitment to goals. In conclusion, this study reveals a significant effect of meaning in life and hope on the psychological well-being of individuals affected by earthquakes. According to this finding, enhancing levels of meaning in life and hope after traumatic events may be crucial for strengthening individuals' psychological well-being.

Although the current study provides important findings regarding the relationship between psychological well-being and meaning in life and hope, the results should be evaluated taking into account some limitations. First of all, the fact that the study group was limited to earthquake victims limits the generalizability of the results to groups with different demographic and psychosocial characteristics. In addition, the cross-sectional design used in the study may be limited in terms of determining causal relationships between the variables. Future studies could examine the long-term effects of meaning in life and hope on psychological well-being using longitudinal or experimental designs. Finally, psychological interventions aimed at alleviating the effects of trauma and supporting the healing process play an important role in this process. Therefore, it is recommended that practitioners include interventions based on meaning in life and hope to improve the psychological well-being of individuals after traumatic experiences

### Ethics and Conflict of Interest
All requisite research ethics guidelines were meticulously followed during the study's execution. Furthermore, the authors affirm that no conflicts of interest exist among them about this article's research, publication or authorship.

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