

Psychological Richness: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

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Abstract

A psychologically rich life is a new form of well-being and an alternative to eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. Psychological richness is associated with happiness and meaning, but it is a different concept with unique predictors and outcomes. Personality correlates of psychological richness are openness to experience, extraversion, and low neuroticism. Moreover, activities like taking trips, reading fiction, studying abroad, and social events are related to higher psychological richness. Additionally, psychological richness is related to higher cognitive complexity, such as the tendency to holistic thinking and attributional complexity. The ultimate end point of psychological richness is wisdom. The Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire was developed to measure psychological richness, and it was adapted into Turkish. The psychologically rich life is a newly suggested way to reach a good life.

Keywords: Psychological richness, good life, well-being, eudaimonic well-being, hedonic well-being.

Psikolojik Zenginlik: Kavramsal Çerçeve ve Literatür Taraması

Özet

Psikolojik zenginlik yeni bir iyi oluş biçimidir ve ödamonik ve hedonik iyi oluşlara alternatif olarak geliştirilmiştir. Psikolojik zenginlik mutluluk ve anlam ile ilişkili fakat kendine özgü belirleyicileri ve sonuçları olan, farklı bir kavramdır. Deneyime açıklık, dışa dönüklük ve düşük nörotisizm psikolojik zenginliğin kişilik özellikleri bakımından yordayıcılarıdır. Bununla birlikte, seyahate çıkmak, kurgu metinler okumak, yurtdışında eğitim görmek, sosyal etkinlikler gibi aktiviteler yüksek psikolojik zenginlik ile ilişkilidir. Ayrıca, psikolojik zenginlik daha yüksek bütünsel düşünme ve atıf karmaşıklığı gibi bilişsel karmaşıklık ile ilişkilidir. Psikolojik zenginliğin nihai sonucu bilgeliktir. Psikolojik zenginlik ölçeği psikolojik zenginliği ölçmek için geliştirilmiş ve Türkçe'ye uyarlanmıştır. Psikolojik zenginlik iyi bir yaşam için yeni ve alternatif bir yoldur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Psikolojik zenginlik, iyi yaşam, iyi oluş, ödomanik iyi oluş, hedonik iyi oluş.

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INTRODUCTION

The main motivation of psychology has been treating psychopathologies for the last century throughout the world. The shift from curing illnesses to increasing individuals' well-being was possible with positive psychology. The emergence of positive psychology starts with Martin Seligman's speech at the American Psychological Association in 1998, where he mentions the importance of building positive qualities and human strengths (The APA 1998 Annual Report, 1999). Positive psychology is a branch that is interested in positive emotions and positive character traits (Seligman et al., 2005) and aims to enhance flourishing and functioning at both the individual level and the group or organizational level (Gable and Haidt, 2005).

In positive psychology, the ways to achieve well-being are explained through the good life in two separate traditions. The first tradition is eudaimonic well-being, which postulates that meaning in life and reaching our potentials are fundamentals of a good life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Whereas, hedonic well-being emphasizes life satisfaction and a high positive-to-negative emotion ratio for a good life (Diener, 1984). For many years, this two-pole explanation was in circulation. However, in 2019, Oishi and colleagues suggested that there is a third possible way to reach a good life, which is psychological richness (Oishi et al., 2020).

A psychologically rich life is a life that contains lots of different experiences that cause mental arousal and a variety of emotions (Besser and Oishi, 2020). Individuals experience new things, and these experiences evoke different emotions, either good or bad, ultimately enhancing their psychological richness. The concepts related to psychological richness are novelty, variety, perspective change, curiosity, energy, time, and wisdom (Oishi et al., 2020; Oishi and Westgate, 2021). Energy and time are the requirements for psychological richness. Additionally, curiosity is the reason behind the new experiences, and wisdom is the destination that is reached through psychological richness.

Besser and Oishi (2020) explain psychological richness with the analogy of a good novel. They explain that good novels generally contain intriguing plots with lots of unexpected incidents, and they drag readers' emotions from emotion to emotion, both negative and positive. Likewise, a psychologically rich life contains lots of experiences, which cause full range of emotions.

Psychological richness is a subjective evaluation of a good life (Oishi and Westgate, 2021), meaning it is based on our personal judgments of our entire life. Hedonic well-being is also subjective since it is evaluated based on how individuals feel and their life satisfaction, but, on the other hand, eudaimonic well-being is considered objective because it depends on some virtuous activities or reaching potential (Haybron, 2011). In this sense, psychological richness is similar to hedonic well-being.

METHOD

The present study investigates the thesis and articles about psychological richness. The investigation was carried out with “psychological richness” and “psychological rich life” keywords in Google Scholar between February and April 2025. As a result of the analysis, the following headings were created: “Factors That Contribute to Psychological Richness” , “The Relationship Between Psychological Richness and Personality” and “Differences Between Psychological Richness and Other Well-Being Concepts” and “Measuring Psychological Richness”.

RESULTS

Differences Between Psychological Richness and Other Well-Being Concepts

Psychological richness is a third and new way of good life. It has a relationship with and even some overlaps with happiness and meaning in life, but it is a different concept both theoretically and empirically (Besser and Oishi; Oishi et al., 2019). Firstly, because happiness, meaning, and richness are well-being concepts, they are correlated with each other. Several studies have found that psychological richness is positively correlated with meaning and happiness (Mauro et al., 2025; Oishi et al., 2019; Yılmaz and Satıcı, in press). Although these concepts are correlated, they are distinct in nature because their predictors and outcomes are different.

Firstly, a study showed that different kinds of activities predict different well-being factors (Oishi et al., 2020b). For instance, playing video games is a predictor for life satisfaction only, and doing religious activities is a predictor for meaning in life. These factors are not related to psychological richness; however, taking short trips and studying abroad were strong predictors for psychological richness but not happiness or meaning.

Furthermore, psychological richness, but not happiness or meaning associated with cognitive complexity factors such as attributional complexity and holism (Oishi et al., 2024). Attributional complexity is the degree of explaining behaviors with complex motives rather than simple ones (Joireman, 2004). Holistic thinking refers to evaluating the objects with the context they belong to (Nisbet et al., 2001) and considering relationships between the object and the whole (Choi et al., 2007).

Moreover, a psychologically rich life is the opposite of a dull life, which is full of daily routines and monotonous in nature (Besser and Oishi, 2020). However, happiness is a form of a steady life requiring consistent social relations, a job, and financial security (Diener et al., 2018). Thus, happiness requires some sort of a habitual life to keep these standards, which is not relevant for psychological richness.

Besides, happiness is determined by positive feelings; therefore, unpleasant events that may evoke negative feelings may endanger happiness. However, these negative and challenging events may

be a chance for psychological richness. For instance, a study showed that individuals who have recovered from Covid-19 infection have higher scores of psychological richness than those who have not been infected (Dahlen and Thorbjørnsen, 2022). Additionally, the same study also reported that people who had recovered were less willing to erase pandemic time from their memories. Challenging events are one of the pieces of a larger whole that shapes us as an individual. Even though they are very distressing, once we overcome them, they become a part of and enrich our life story.

Furthermore, a study found that happiness is a present-time-oriented concept and irrelevant to the past and future (Baumeister et al., 2013). However, psychological richness is the sum of all our lives, so it encapsulates all of our lives, not just the moment we are in. Therefore, a temporary negative event may damage individuals' happiness, but it may not be related to their psychological richness, or it may even increase their level of psychological richness, as happened in the Covid-19 study (Dahlen and Thorbjørnsen, 2022). Besides, happiness, meaning, and psychological richness have different outcomes. Happiness leads to personal satisfaction, meaning leads to a better society, and psychological richness leads to wisdom (Oishi and Westgate, 2022).

Factors That Contribute to Psychological Richness

Psychologically rich experiences cause cognitive interaction and include awe, complexity, and perspective change (Oishi and Westgate, 2021). These experiences could be something that requires personal attendance, like traveling or hiking; on the other hand, learning through others' experiences, such as reading a novel or watching a movie or a sports competition, could be psychologically rich (Besser and Oishi, 2020). A study investigated the experiences related to psychological richness and found that artistic activities (concerts or art shows), doing exercise or sports, social events like club activities and partying, taking a trip, and shopping were found to be associated with higher psychological richness, and the strongest predictor of psychological richness was taking short trips (Oishi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the same study also found that studying abroad is also associated with psychological richness (Oishi et al., 2021). Study abroad is a complex situation that includes lots of daily stimulus. Additionally, living abroad and multicultural experiences contributes creative process through developing ideas and recalling unusual information (Leung et al., 2008). Therefore, the relationship between psychological richness and study abroad is not surprising. Moreover, a study found that reading fiction books is associated with psychological richness (Buttrick et al., 2023), as hypothesized by earlier studies (Besser and Oishi, 2020; Oishi et al., 2021).

The Relationship Between Psychological Richness and Personality

The relationship between personality and psychological richness was also examined in various studies. Firstly, Oishi and colleagues (2019) investigated this relationship in four different samples,

including American and Indian citizens, and they found that openness to experiences, extraversion, and lower neuroticism predicted psychological richness. Openness is related to novelty, diversity, and generating ideas (Costa and Crae, 2011). These characteristics of openness may lead to trying new things and increasing psychological richness. Moreover, openness is related to curiosity, creativity, and creative achievement (Kaufman et al., 2015; Silvia and Christensen, 2020). Curiosity is considered the motivation for learning (Peterson and Hidi, 2019). This motivation for learning may serve as the driving force behind experiencing new things and eventually psychological richness.

Furthermore, psychological richness was predicted by extraversion. Oishi and Westgate (2025) explain this relationship with the help of broaden-and-build theory by Fredrickson (2004). According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions like joy, interest, love, etc., broaden individuals' thought-action collection and help them to provide their personal physical, psychological, and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Additionally, these positive emotions drive actions like exploring, playing, integrating, etc. (Fredrickson, 2004). When it comes to extraversion and psychological richness, extraverted individuals feel positive emotions, which urge them to explore things, which eventually increase their psychological richness (Oishi and Westgate, 2025).

Finally, low neuroticism was found to be correlated with psychological richness. Neuroticism is a personality trait characterized by increased stress, which induces negative emotions constantly (Barlow et al., 2014a). Additionally, neurotic individuals believe that the world is full of threats (Barlow et al., 2014b). This higher anticipation of threat may prevent individuals from trying new things. Overall, because psychological richness is a well-being concept, it is not surprising to be negatively correlated with psychological richness.

Measuring Psychological Richness

The Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire is a self-report questionnaire, and it was developed by Oishi and others (2019) to measure psychological richness. Oishi and colleagues created a 36-item pool to measure psychological richness. The 17 items in that pool were included in the questionnaire, and these showed high internal consistency and test-retest reliability. The same study tested the questionnaire in different samples and showed that the 12-item form was better suited to the non-Western sample. Researchers conclude that the 12-item form is a good alternative to the 17-item form.

The Turkish form was adapted by Yılmaz and Satıcı (in press). The confirmatory factor analyses revealed that the fit indices of the 17-item form were not in the proper range. However, as suggested as an alternative to a 17-item form by Oishi and others (2019), the fit indices of the 12-item form were in an acceptable range. Therefore, the 12-item form was accepted by Yılmaz and Satıcı (in press). Factor loadings of the Turkish form were between .438 and .847, and analyses indicated measurement invariance

across gender. Reliability analysis showed high internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was found .92. To test criterion-related validity, the Satisfaction With Life Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale, and Flourishing Scale were used. Psychological richness was found to be positively correlated with subjective happiness, satisfaction with life, and flourishing. The Turkish form of the Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire is valid and reliable.

The Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire was adopted into different languages as well. Mauro et al. (2025) adapted it into Italian. As the original form and Turkish form, the Italian adaptation is in a single-factor structure with excellent internal consistency and good reliability scores. A Chinese adaptation also was made using college students (Gu et al., 2023). The Chinese form showed high internal consistency. On the other hand, another study investigated the convergent validity of the scale among Chinese high school students (Zhao et al., 2025). This study also demonstrated high internal consistency and supported a two-factor structure, which differs from the other studies.

CONCLUSION

The psychologically rich life is a third way of a good life, and it is an alternative to eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. A psychologically rich life is a life full of new experiences, which lead to mental stimulation and alter perspective. Psychological richness is related to well-being concepts like happiness and meaning, but it differs theoretically and empirically. The personality correlates of psychological richness are openness to experiences, extraversion, and low neuroticism. Furthermore, activities such as traveling, exercising, partying, and shopping are associated with psychological richness. Overall, psychological richness may be a better fit for people who cannot find what they are looking for in a good life in happiness or meaning.

Ethical Approval: Ethical approval was not required for this study. Research and publication ethics were followed throughout the study.

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