

Fear of Happiness: A Systematic Review

Mutluluk Korkusu: Sistemik Bir Derleme

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ABSTRACT

Fear of happiness, a pervasive issue particularly in Western societies, adversely affects individuals' mental health and is closely linked to significant life outcomes. As an emerging research area, the limited number of studies on this phenomenon underscores the need for a comprehensive literature review to enhance understanding of its nature, effects, and mental health implications, while identifying gaps for future research. This study aims to systematically analyze existing literature on fear of happiness. A systematic review was conducted, synthesizing findings from published articles based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, using content analysis and adhering to the PRISMA guidelines. As of October 19, 2024, searches across PubMed, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals, and TR Index databases identified 224 articles, with 23 meeting the inclusion criteria. These studies were evaluated based on publication year, research location, objectives, sample characteristics, measurement tools, and findings, revealing considerable variability across these parameters.

Keywords: Happiness, fear of happiness, systematic review

ÖZ

Mutluluk korkusu, özellikle Batı toplumlarında yaygın olan ve bireylerin ruh sağlığını olumsuz etkileyen, önemli yaşam sonuçlarıyla doğrudan bağlantılı yıkıcı bir fenomendir. Yeni ortaya çıkan bir araştırma alanı olarak, bu fenomenin bireyler üzerindeki etkileri hakkında sınırlı sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır ve bu da kapsamlı bir literatür taramasının gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu tarama, mutluluk korkusunun doğasını, etkilerini ve zihinsel sağlık üzerindeki yansımalarını daha iyi anlamayı ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için eksik bilgi alanlarını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, mutluluk korkusu üzerine mevcut literatürü sistemik olarak analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Yayınlanmış makalelerden elde edilen bulgular, önceden belirlenmiş dahil etme ve dışlama kriterlerine dayanılarak içerik analizi yöntemiyle sentezlenmiş ve PRISMA yönergelerine uygun olarak sistemik bir inceleme gerçekleştirilmiştir. 19 Ekim 2024 itibarıyla, PubMed, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals ve TR Index veri tabanlarında yapılan aramalar sonucunda 224 makale tespit edilmiş, bunlardan 23'ü dahil etme kriterlerine uygun olarak çalışma grubunu oluşturmuştur. Bu çalışmalar, yayın yılı, araştırma yeri, amaçlar, örnek özellikleri, ölçüm araçları ve bulgular gibi birden fazla parametreye göre sistemik olarak değerlendirilmiş ve bu parametrelerde önemli bir çeşitlilik olduğu gözlemlenmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Mutluluk, mutluluk korkusu, sistemik derleme

Introduction

Happiness is a concept that occupies a significant position in people's lives and is regarded as a perpetual desirable objective (Blasco-Belled et al. 2021). However, in recent years, psychological research has revealed that happiness, rather than merely a desirable goal, has a complex and multidimensional nature (Joshnloo and Weijers 2014). These studies have introduced the concept of "fear of happiness", suggesting that certain individuals exhibit a tendency to refrain from experiencing happiness (Joshnloo 2013).

Fear of happiness stems from the negative beliefs developed by individuals such as the perception that they do not deserve happiness, happiness is temporary, evil, and dangerous, it results in competition and jealousy, it is obtained by unfair means, or it creates misfortunes (Minami 1971, Lyubomirsky 2000, Hinks and Davies 2012, Joshnloo et al. 2014, Lambrou 2014). Gilbert et al. (2014) reported that a child's previous life experiences, such as experiencing guilt associated with feelings of joy and happiness during a family member's illness, or encountering a crisis while experiencing positive emotions and subsequently being punished, may contribute to the development of fear of happiness. Similarly, other researchers have asserted that negative experiences, traumatic events, and situations in early childhood play a crucial role in the emergence of fear of happiness (Lambrou 2014, Harris 2017). Furthermore, researchers have presented evidence that individuals experience fear of happiness and are reluctant to display and express happiness under the influence of several factors such as social norms, individual personality traits, and cultural factors (Miyamoto and Ma 2011, Agbo

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and Ngwu 2017, Şar et al. 2019, Çevik 2020, Ahi et al. 2021, Erkoç et al. 2021, Deniz et al. 2022, Elmas 2022). For example, Joshanloo and Weijers (2014) emphasized that the tendency of individuals from different cultural backgrounds to avoid experiencing happiness is formed by a variety of reasons. At this point, they argued that negative beliefs of individuals (such as the notion that happiness may lead to negative experiences; that it could result in unfavorable moral evaluations of a person; that expressing positive emotions might have adverse consequences for both the individual expressing them and those in their vicinity; and that the pursuit of happiness could be associated with negative outcomes for both the individual and their social circle) cause fear of happiness. In conclusion, these researchers have highlighted that, for some people and in certain cultures, such as many East Asian cultures, the demand for happiness is regarded as an undesirable temptation.

While researchers have reported that negative beliefs regarding happiness may lead to fear of happiness, they also indicated that the consequences of fear of happiness can be profound and destructive (Türkmen and Sezer 2023, Elmas and Çevik 2024). As a matter of fact, several studies on fear of happiness have provided evidence of the association of fear of happiness with negative mental health indicators (Bloore et al. 2020, Jordan et al. 2021, Lyvers et al. 2023). Belen et al. (2020), for example, highlighted the negative effects of fear of happiness on well-being of individuals. Besides, Gilbert et al. (2014) found that both fear of affection and fear of happiness have a strong association with alexithymia and depression. In his study, Tunç (2020) detected a negative relationship between fear of happiness and life satisfaction. Similarly, numerous studies have reported results on the negative effects of fear of happiness on subjective and psychological well-being (Demirci et al. 2016, Arslan 2021). Moreover, studies have revealed that fear of happiness exhibits negative associations with hope (Chakraborty and Pandey 2023) and resilience (Yıldırım 2019), while it demonstrates a positive relationship with depressive symptoms (Jordan et al. 2021) and psychological vulnerability (Elmas 2022). Additionally, research has also focused on positive psychological traits, such as mindfulness and hope, which can assist individuals in overcoming the fear of happiness (Gilbert et al. 2012, Belen et al. 2020). Thus, they emphasized the positive outcomes of reducing the fear of happiness. For instance, Ekşi et al. (2019) found that self-compassion increases as result of the decrease in fear of happiness, and thereby enabling individuals to express their feelings more effectively.

The study findings demonstrate the negative effects of the fear of happiness on the individuals' quality of life and the potential benefits of reducing this fear (Joshanloo et al. 2014, Yıldırım and Aziz 2017, Elmas 2022). These results underscore the necessity to develop strategies to enhance the psychological well-being of individuals and emphasize the significance of further research on the fear of happiness (Belen et al. 2020). Extant studies are insufficient to comprehensively understand the complex dynamics of fear of happiness (Gilbert et al. 2012, De Vuyst et al. 2023) and additional studies are essential to comprehend this concept (Yıldırım 2019). In this context, this systematic review of previous research on the fear of happiness will provide researchers with a more profound understanding of the psychological constructs and effects associated with this concept and provide an opportunity to better understand the current state of knowledge. This study aims to expand the existing body of knowledge in the field and shed light on future research. In addition, the findings are expected to make significant contributions to individuals' understanding of their emotional experiences and developing strategies to cope with the fear of happiness.

Method

Research Model

This research is a systematic review study examining the literature on fear of happiness and its associated findings. Systematic review is a methodological approach that involves the collection and evaluation of studies that meet predetermined eligibility criteria, with the aim of addressing a particular research question. In this process, the properties and findings of the selected studies are systematically gathered and presented (Higgins and Green 2011). Content analysis method is frequently used in such research (Bellibaş and Gümüş 2018). In this study, PubMed, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals and TR Index databases were examined in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria and descriptive content analysis method was employed. Descriptive content analysis is defined as a method based on the selection of the literature related to the subject within the framework of certain criteria, the presentation and interpretation of the obtained data (Bellibaş 2018).

Literature Review and Selection Process

The PRISMA report was used to determine the study group (Moher et al. 2009) and a structured literature

review was conducted retrospectively as of October 19, 2024, involving research articles in Turkish and English published in PubMed, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals, and TR Index databases. The keywords utilized for the literature review were selected based on consideration of previous studies on the fear of happiness (Joshano and Weijers 2014, Çevik 2020). These keywords were formulated in various iterations, including "mutluluk korkusu", "fear of happiness", "fear of being happy", "aversion of happiness", "fear" AND "happiness", "fear" AND "being" AND "happy", "aversion" AND "happiness". This search methodology yielded 224 relevant studies. Based on these studies, various inclusion criteria were considered to determine the study group. In this context, research articles with relevant keywords in the title and studies written in English or Turkish were included in the research. In addition, only one of the repeated studies was incorporated into the study. On the other hand, studies that unable to meet the inclusion criteria such as letters, book chapters, book reviews, editorial materials, reviews, meta-analyses, and studies with inaccessible full texts were excluded from the scope. Thus, 201 studies were eliminated based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria from the 224 examined studies. 23 articles were included in the study after excluding studies that did not contain keywords in the title of the study and were unrelated to the subject (n=173), studies with inaccessible full texts (n=5), repeated studies (n=21), and review studies (n=2). The flow chart for the identification and selection of these studies is presented in Figure 1.

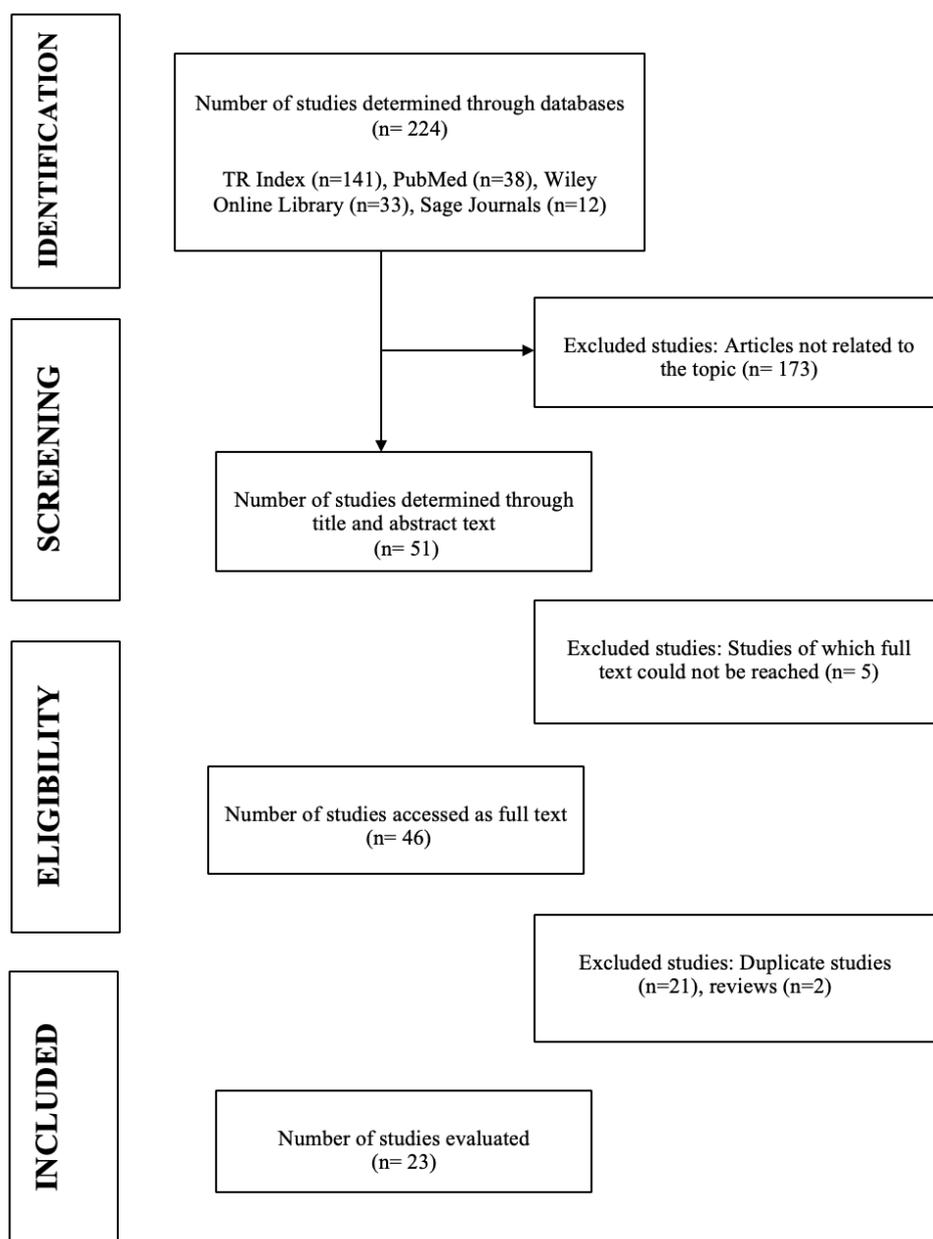


Figure 1. Flow chart of the studies examined within the scope of research

In the course of the research process, an "Article Review Form" was developed for the systematic analysis of articles. The form's purpose was to facilitate the examination of articles within the research scope according to a specific methodology. This approach was intended to enhance the validity and reliability of the research (Büyüköztürk et al. 2019). The form encompassed information such as the authors of the study, the research title, the year of publication, the country of origin, the research objectives, the sample population, the measurement tools employed, and the research findings. Given that this study constitutes a systematic review, it is exempt from the category of research requiring Ethics Committee approval. Consequently, Ethics Committee Permission has not been declared.

Results

In this section, the methodological features and findings of the studies will be discussed. In this context, the authors, publication years, countries of origin, objectives, sample characteristics, measurement tools utilized, and findings of the studies are presented in Table 1.

Features of the Studies

Table 1 demonstrates that the studies included in the review were conducted between 2012-2024. A significant diversity is observed in terms of the countries where the research was carried out. Türkiye represents a significant field of focus in the majority of these studies (Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Şar et al. 2019, Yıldırım 2019, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Belen et al. 2020, Ekşi et al. 2020, Arslan 2021, Baş et al. 2021, Erkoç et al. 2021, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Deniz et al. 2022, Elmas 2022, Koyuncu and Bülbül 2022, Kulbaş 2022). Additionally, several international studies warrant attention; for example, Gilbert et al. (2014) from the UK, Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) from Spain, Jordan et al. (2021) and Collins et al. (2023) from the USA, Kock et al. (2023) from Belgium, Dobos et al. (2024) from Hungary. Moreover, Joshanloo et al. (2014), presented a multinational perspective by conducting research with individuals from 14 different countries in their research.

The majority of research has focused on examining the effects of fear of happiness on life satisfaction (Joshanloo et al. 2014, Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Yıldırım 2019, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Elmas 2022) and depression (Gilbert et al. 2012, Gilbert et al. 2014, Blasco-Belled et al. 2021, Jordan et al. 2021, Kock et al. 2023). In addition, the adaptation of the fear of happiness scale to Turkish (Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017) and the methodological studies on measurement invariance across 14 countries (Joshanloo et al. 2014) are noteworthy. It is also evident that research objectives vary considerably and encompass a broad spectrum of topics.

Participants

The studies consist of various groups of participants. Sample sizes ranged from 52 participants (Gilbert et al. 2014) to 2,398 participants (Joshanloo et al. 2014). In the majority of the studies, it is observed that the number of female participants exceeds that of male participants. This can be exemplified in the study conducted by Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) in which 82% of the participants were women. However, some studies demonstrate a balanced distribution in terms of gender ratios (e.g., Şar et al. 2019). Additionally, it is evident that the sample groups of the studies consist of diverse participants such as young adults, secondary, high school and university students, teachers, pregnant women, and mothers with children with special needs. Notably, university students are frequently selected as participants in studies. In general, it is noticed that majority of the research is carried out with non-clinical sample groups.

Measurement Tools

In the studies examined within the scope of the research, the most frequently used scale in conjunction with the Fear of Happiness Scale is the Life Satisfaction Scale (Joshanloo et al. 2014, Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Yıldırım 2019, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Elmas 2022). On the other hand, it is observed that diverse measurement tools are employed to assess the psychological states of various groups of participants in the studies. For example, in a study conducted with high school students, the "Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale" was selected (Deniz et al. 2022). In addition, it is observed that the scales used vary depending on the variables of the research. In this context, researchers utilized the "Maslach Burnout Inventory" to assess burnout levels, the "UCLA Loneliness Scale" (Dobos et al. 2024) to measure

loneliness levels, and the "Toronto Alexithymia Scale" to determine alexithymia levels (Gilbert et al. 2012; Gilbert et al. 2014).

Table 1. General characteristics and findings of the studies examined				
(Author/Year/Country)	Purpose	Sample	Measures	Results
Arslan (2021) Türkiye	To investigate whether psychological maltreatment predicts the psychological well-being of young adults through the fear of happiness and the externality of happiness.	490 young adults (36% male)	Psychological Maltreatment Scale, Brief Adjustment Scale-6, Fear of Happiness Scale, Externality of Happiness Scale	Psychological maltreatment has been shown to have a significant predictive effect on psychological well-being, fear of happiness, and externality of happiness. Fear of happiness and the externality of happiness mediated the effect of psychological maltreatment on psychological well-being.
Baş et al. (2021) Türkiye	Examination of the predictive relationships between adolescents' emotional intelligence, fear of happiness and humor styles.	226 high school students 136 F, 90 M	Emotional Intelligence Trait Scale – Short Form, Fear of Happiness Scale, Humor Styles Scale	It has been revealed that there is a significant linear relationship between adolescents' emotional intelligence and humor styles. Besides there was a negative linear and significant relationship between adolescents' fear of happiness and emotional intelligence.
Belen and Barmanpek (2020) Türkiye	To investigate the mediating role of gratitude in the relationship between fear of happiness and life satisfaction.	344 university students 264 F, 80 M	Fear of Happiness Scale, Gratitude Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale	A significant correlation was found between fear of happiness, subscales of the gratitude scale (simple lack of appreciation and lack of deprivation) and life satisfaction. No relationship was found between fear of happiness and appreciating others subscale. The absence of simple appreciation and a sense of deprivation of the elements of gratitude has a full mediating effect on the relationship between fear of happiness and life satisfaction.
Belen et al. (2020) Türkiye	The investigate mediating roles of agency and pathways in the relationship between the fear of happiness and flourishing.	226 university students 169 M, 57 F	Dispositional Hope Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale, Flourishing Scale.	Significant negative relationships were found between fear of happiness and hope (agency and pathways) and flourishing. Experiencing less fear about engaging with beliefs regarding happiness increases motivation to achieve desired goals (agency) and perceived capacity to produce tools (pathways) to achieve life goals, which in turn increases levels of flourishing.
Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) Spain	To investigate the relationship between fear of happiness and depression and happiness through the prism of the dual continua model of mental health	Study 1 254 university students (82% female) Study 2 243 university students (82% female)	Study 1 Fear of Happiness Scale, Patient Health Survey, Subjective Happiness Scale Study 2 Positive and Negative Affect Scale	Fear of happiness was positively and negatively predicted by depression and happiness, respectively. Fearless individuals reported higher levels of positive affect and happiness, and lower levels of negative affect, and depression compared to fearful individuals.
Collins et al. (2023) USA	To examine the relationship between implicit happiness and explicit (self-reported) fear of happiness.	The research consists of 3 separate studies: Study 1 -Time 1 705 participants 501 F, 204 M	Implicit Theories of Emotion Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale, The Implicit Measures of Distinct Emotional States	Greater fear of happiness has been found to be associated with less implicit happiness. It is asserted that individuals with negative views regarding positivity may interpret

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		-Time 2 375 participants 266 F, 109 M, -Time 3 292 participants 209 F, 83 M -Time 4 220 participants 153 F, 67 M Study 2 255 participants 157 F, 98 M Study 3 889 participants 587 F, 302 M		implicit happiness in a devaluing way.
Demirci et al. (2016) Türkiye	To adapt the Fear of Happiness Scale, developed by Joshanloo in 2013, into Turkish and to examine the validity and reliability of the scale.	283 university students 217 F, 66 M	Life Satisfaction Scale, Subjective Happiness Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale	Negative correlations between fear of happiness and life satisfaction and subjective happiness revealed the criterion-related validity of the scale. It has been reported that the Turkish form of the Fear of Happiness Scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool and can be used in scientific research to be conducted in Türkiye.
Deniz et al. (2022) Türkiye	To examine the relationships between adolescents' fear of happiness, psychological resilience and future expectations, as well as to examine the predictive effect of adolescents' psychological resilience and future expectation on their fear of happiness.	306 high school students 185 M, 121 F	Fear of Happiness Scale, Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale, Adolescent Future Expectations Scale	Adolescents' fear of happiness does not vary according to their gender and the educational status of the parents. On the other hand, the fear of happiness varies depending on the socioeconomic status and the trauma experienced in childhood. In addition, while there was a significant negative relationship between adolescents' future expectations and fear of happiness, there was no significant relationship between psychological resilience.
Dobos et al. (2024) Hungary	To investigate the relationships between fear of happiness, perfectionism, loneliness, hopelessness and academic burnout.	1,148 University students 970 F, 178 M	Fear of Happiness Scale, Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey, Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, Hopelessness Scale	Men reported higher levels of fear of happiness and perfectionism than women. Both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, academic burnout, loneliness, and hopelessness have been shown to be positively associated with fear of happiness. Gender has a positive role but age has a negative role in the levels of fear of happiness.
Ekşi et al. (2020) Türkiye	To examine the mediating role of self-compassion in the relationship between university students' fear of happiness and their ability to express their feelings.	219 university students 142 F, 77 M	Personal Information Form, Fear of Happiness Scale, Self-Compassion Scale, Expressing Emotions Scale	While there is a negative relationship between fear of happiness and self-compassion; a positive relationship was found between self-compassion and expressing feelings. It has been observed that self-compassion is an intermediary variable in the relationship between fear of

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				happiness and expressing feelings. Regarding gender, it was revealed that only the variable of expressing their feelings showed a significant difference in favor of female students.
Elmas (2022) Türkiye	To examine the relationship between teachers' cognitive distortions regarding relationships, life satisfaction and psychological vulnerability with fear of happiness.	738 teachers 394 F, 344 M	Personal Information Form, Fear of Happiness Scale, Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale Psychological Vulnerability Scale	It was found that there was a moderately positive relationship between fear of happiness and interpersonal cognitive distortions, a low level of negative relationship between life satisfaction, and a low positive relationship between psychological vulnerability. It has been reported that there is a significant relationship between life satisfaction and interpersonal cognitive distortions and psychological vulnerability at a low negative level, and a positive relationship between cognitive distortions related to relationships and psychological vulnerability. It has been revealed that cognitive distortions in relationships, life satisfaction and psychological vulnerability variables have a statistically significant effect on the fear of happiness.
Erkoç et al. (2021) Türkiye	To determine the relationship between family harmony, fear of happiness and psychological well-being of individuals and to evaluate the results obtained from a social work perspective as well as to make recommendations.	412 individuals 236 F, 176 M	Family Harmony Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale, Psychological Well-Being Scale	The level of family harmony and psychological well-being was relatively high, and the fear of happiness was moderate. A positive high correlation was found between family harmony and psychological well-being, and a negative low correlation was found between fear of happiness. Family harmony and fear of happiness have been shown to be significant predictors of psychological well-being.
Gilbert et al. (2014) UK	To examine the links of fear of happiness and affection with depression, alexithymia, adult attachment qualities, social security, and pleasure in a depressive sample.	52 participants 36 F, 16 M	Fear of Happiness Scale, Fear of Compassion Scale, Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale, Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Adult Attachment Scale, Social Safeness and Pleasure Scale	Fears of compassion and happiness have been found to be highly associated with alexithymia, adult attachment, and depression, anxiety, and stress. Fear of happiness has been found to be the best predictor of depression, anxiety, and stress, while fear of compassion from others is the best predictor of adult attachment. It has been shown that positive emotion fears fully mediate the link between alexithymia and depression. It was reported that the mean scores of fears of positive emotions, alexithymia, and depression, anxiety, and stress of this clinical sample were higher than a previously studied sample of students.

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(Author/Year/Country)	Purpose	Sample	Measures	Results
Jordan et al. (2021) USA	To examine the relationship between negative affective interference and fear of happiness with depression.	Data were collected at different time points (N=375); 476 total participants and 887 total observations were used in parameter estimation.	Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology -Self-Report Form, Hedonic Deficit and Interference Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale	Negative affect interference and fear of happiness were found to be positively associated with depressive symptoms. Negative affect interference and fear of happiness have been shown to predict depressive symptoms when included in the same model.
Joshanloo et al. (2014) New Zealand Iran Singapore Hong Kong Malaysia Japan Korea Taiwan India Russia Brazil Kenya Pakistan Kuwait	To investigate the measurement invariance, cross-level isomorphism, predictive validity and nomological network of the fear of happiness scale across 15 countries through using multi-group confirmatory factor analysis and multi-level modeling	2,398 university students from 14 countries New Zealand (169, 63.3% female) Iran (220, 54.5% female) Singapore (221, 50.7% female) Hong Kong (85, 62.4% female) Malaysia (219, 44.3% female) Japan (270, 41.9% female) Korea (150, 39.3% female) Taiwan (207, 63.8% female) India (150, 58.7% female) Russia (150, 67.3% female) Brazil (136, 64% female) Kenya (109, 50.5% female) Pakistan (208, 57.2% female) Kuwait (104, 58.7% female)	Measurements were carried out at the cultural level (subjective well-being, guidance sources, relevance, social axioms, individualism, national wealth) and at the individual level. Fear of Happiness Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale, Dampening subscale of the Responses to Positive Affect scale, Personal Growth Initiative Scale, Autonomy Subscale of the Individualism Scale	It has been shown that the fear of happiness scale has good statistical properties at both individual and cultural levels.
Kock et al. (2023) Belgium	To investigate whether the fear of happiness and the fear of losing control prospectively predict depressive symptoms in adolescents.	128 middle school students 11 students did not participate in the follow-up assessment.	Depression Subscale of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale, Positive Affect Subscale of Affective Control Scale	Fear of happiness predicted depressive symptoms simultaneously, but not prospectively. No significant relationship was found between fear of happiness and consumption anhedonia. Fear of losing control has not been shown to be a significant predictor of depressive symptoms or consumption anhedonia.
Koyuncu and Bülbül (2022) Türkiye	To examine the relationship between the fear of happiness experienced by pregnant women and prenatal attachment and some socio-demographic factors.	385 pregnant women	İndividual Information Form, Fear of Happiness Scale, Prenatal Attachment Inventory	It was determined that there was a weak non-significant relationship between fear of happiness and prenatal attachment in pregnant women. In addition, it was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the education period, family type, number of living children and the total score of the Fear of Happiness Scale. It was revealed that the pregnant women participating in the study experienced the fear of happiness at low levels and this fear did not significantly affect their attachment processes to their babies.

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(Author/ Year/Country)	Purpose	Sample	Measures	Results
Kulbaş (2022) Türkiye	To examine the fear of happiness and gratitude levels of mothers with children with special needs in terms of socio-demographic variables and to investigate the relationships between fear of happiness and gratitude levels.	312 mothers with children diagnosed with mental retardation or autism	Demographic Information Form, Fear of Happiness Scale, Gratitude Scale	It was found that the fear of happiness and gratitude levels of mothers with children with special needs differed in terms of age, economic status, education level, and number of children, and there was a negative significant relationship between gratitude levels and fear of happiness.
Gilbert et al. (2012) UK	To investigate the relationship between fears of compassion and happiness and emotional processing capacities (alexithymia), awareness capacities and empathic abilities.	185 university students 153 F, 32 M	Fear of Compassion Scales, Toronto Alexithymia Scale, Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire, Davis Interpersonal Reactivity Index, Types of Positive Affect Scale, Forms of Self-Criticism and Self-Reassurance Scale, Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale	Compassion for self and others, and in particular fear of happiness, has been found to be highly associated with alexithymia, mindfulness, empathy, self-criticism and different aspects of depression, anxiety and stress. It has been reported that there is a very high correlation between fear of happiness and depression ($r = .70$).
Şar et al. (2019) Türkiye	To evaluate the fear of happiness in university students and its relationship with gender, childhood psychological trauma and dissociation.	184 university students 93 F, 91 M	Fear of Happiness Scale (FHS), Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES)	There is a significant correlation in terms of the total scores of the FHS, CTQ and DES, and there was no difference between them and the genders. DES was found to be associated with the total scores of the CTQ in both genders. Women scored higher than men on childhood emotional abuse and fear of "the end of joy is bad faith." Female dissociative taxon members were found to have higher scores compared to non-members in all types of childhood trauma except sexual abuse, and in all types of fear of happiness except "good fortune ends in disaster", which is the only type of fear that is significantly higher among male dissociative taxon members. Depersonalization, childhood emotional neglect and physical abuse predicted fear of happiness among women; among men, it has been shown that introversion predicts the fear of happiness.
Tekke and Ceylan (2021) Türkiye	To examine separation anxiety, religious coping, fear of happiness, and life satisfaction.	187 high school students 104 F, 83 M	Separation Anxiety Symptom Inventory, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Fear of Happiness Scale, Islamic Positive Religious Coping Scale	It was found that being away from a secure base, one of the sub-factors of separation anxiety, was positively associated with the fear of happiness and negatively associated with religious coping and life satisfaction. There was no significant relationship between separation anxiety and life satisfaction. Religious coping has

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(Author/Year/Country)	Purpose	Sample	Measures	Results
				been found to be negatively associated with fear of happiness and separation anxiety.
Türk et al. (2017) Türkiye	To examine the psychometric properties of the Fear of Happiness Scale for Turkish university students.	500 university students 353 F, 147 M	Fear of Happiness Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale	A negative and significant relationship between the Fear of Happiness Scale and the Life Satisfaction Scale was observed. It has been reported that the Fear of Happiness Scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool for Turkish university students.
Yıldırım (2019) Türkiye	To examine the mediating role of resilience in the relationships between fear of happiness and affective balance, satisfaction with life and flourishing.	256 adults 174 M, 82 F	Fear of Happiness Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale, Positive and Negative Experience Scales, Flourishing Scale, Brief Resilience Scale	Fear of happiness is negatively associated with resilience, affective balance, satisfaction with life and flourishing. In addition, resilience has been shown to be positively associated with affective balance, satisfaction with life and flourishing. In addition, resilience was found to be fully mediated by the impact of fear of happiness on flourishing and life satisfaction; It has been found that the effect of fear of happiness on affective balance is partially mediated.

F=Female M=Male

Findings of the Studies

Studies have revealed that fear of happiness is intricately associated with various psychological variables such as self-compassion (Ekşi et al. 2020), gratitude (Belen and Barmanpek 2020), flourishing (Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020), and separation anxiety (Tekke and Ceylan, 2021). Besides, studies have provided evidence that fear of happiness is positively associated with depression, negative affect, and cognitive distortion in relationships. To illustrate, Gilbert et al. (2014) stated that fear of happiness is the most significant predictor of depression, while Blasco-Belled et al. (2021) emphasized that this fear is associated with higher negative affect. Similarly, Elmas (2022) revealed the positive relationship between cognitive distortions in relationships and fear of happiness. On the other hand, studies have reported negative associations between fear of happiness and psychological well-being, life satisfaction and emotional intelligence. For example, Arslan (2021) emphasizes the negative impact of fear of happiness on psychological well-being, while Belen and Barmanpek (2020) and Türk et al. (2017) found that this fear reduces life satisfaction. Baş et al. (2021), on the other hand, revealed that the fear of happiness negatively affects emotional intelligence. Moreover, studies have emphasized that fear of happiness is a valid concept at both individual and cultural levels (Demirci et al. 2016, Joshanloo et al. 2014, Türk et al. 2017). Although contradictory findings (Deniz et al. 2022, Dobos et al. 2024) can be found that fear of happiness may differ between individuals and groups in terms of some variables (e.g., gender), it was noticed that most of the studies clearly revealed the negative effects of fear of happiness on mental health, and it was observed that resilience (Yıldırım 2019) and self-compassion (Ekşi et al. 2020) mediated this relationship.

Discussion

Fear of happiness is a destructive phenomenon that can profoundly impact the quality of life of individuals and has a strong association with mental health issues (Joshanloo 2018, Bloore et al. 2020, Jordan et al. 2021, Joshanloo 2023, Lyvers et al. 2023). A comprehensive examination of this concept is essential for enhancing the emotional well-being of individuals and maintaining their psychological health (Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020). This investigation conducted a systematic review of research pertaining to the fear of happiness and provided a comprehensive description of the general implementation frameworks in this domain. The analysis

encompassed 23 research articles, which were evaluated based on multiple criteria: publication year, study location, research aims, participant demographics, employed assessment tools, and reported findings.

Based on the results, the studies on the fear of happiness were carried out between 2012 and 2024. This temporal range may be attributed to the relatively recent emergence of the fear of happiness as a concept in the literature, with studies in both Turkish and English languages being contemporary (Çevik 2020). Furthermore, a significant geographical diversity was observed in the research locations. Yet, majority of these studies were conducted in Türkiye (Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Şar et al. 2019, Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Ekşi et al. 2020, Arslan 2021, Baş et al. 2021, Erkoç et al. 2021, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Deniz et al. 2022, Elmas 2022, Koyuncu and Bülbül 2022, Kulbaş 2022). Since the influence of Turkish culture on individuals' perception of happiness and happiness-related fears, this is regarded as a reasonable outcome. To illustrate, this is due to the prevalent beliefs within Turkish culture, which may compel individuals to conceal their true feelings, stemming from the apprehension that displaying happiness could be deemed inappropriate and might incite jealousy in others (Türk et al. 2017). On the other hand, several international studies on the fear of happiness are noteworthy. For example, data from various countries such as the UK (Gilbert et al. 2014), Spain (Blasco-Belled et al. 2021), the USA (Jordan et al. 2021, Collins et al. 2023), Belgium (Kock et al. 2023), and Hungary (Dobos et al. 2024) underline the global dimension of the fear of happiness and the effects of cultural differences on this phenomenon.

As a matter of fact, cultures play a significant role in regulating feelings and forming emotional experiences by influencing individuals' attitudes towards happiness (Miyamoto and Ma 2011). At this point, multinational studies conducted by Joshanloo et al. (2014) compile the experiences of diverse cultures and suggest the impact of these cultures on the fear of happiness, emphasizing the multidimensional nature of this phenomenon. However, current studies are insufficient (Gilbert et al. 2012, De Vuyst et al. 2023) and additional multinational studies addressing cultural diversity are required to provide better understanding of the relationship between cultural factors and fear of happiness. Thus, the multidimensional nature of the fear of happiness can be enlightened.

The majority of the studies within the scope of this research aimed to examine the effects of fear of happiness on life satisfaction (Joshanloo et al. 2014, Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Yıldırım 2019, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Elmas 2022) and depression (Gilbert et al. 2012, Gilbert et al. 2014, Jordan et al. 2021, Kock et al. 2023). These two constructs are critical factors having direct impact on the psychological health of individuals (Blasco-Belled et al. 2021). In particular, the potential of fear of happiness to reduce life satisfaction can lead individuals to restrain their positive feelings, to inadequately appreciate the positive aspects of their lives, and ultimately a decrease in their overall life satisfaction (Yıldırım and Aziz 2017, Elmas 2022). Moreover, fear of happiness can undermine individuals' coping mechanisms with negative emotions (Arslan et al. 2021, Uğur et al. 2021), which may increase the risk of depression (Bloore et al. 2020, Lyvers et al. 2023). Therefore, it is considerable point that the studies focus on the cited purposes for an in-depth understanding of the impacts of fear of happiness on mental health and for the development of strategies to improve the psychological well-being of individuals. On the other hand; methodological studies, which were carried out to adapt the fear of happiness scale to Turkish (Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017) and to reveal the measurement invariance across 14 countries (Joshanloo et al. 2014), enhance the evaluation of the fear of happiness and its applicability in comparative research. These collaborative investigations conducted across multiple nations facilitate the comprehension of fear of happiness within diverse cultural contexts. Nevertheless, the observation that fear of happiness is experienced at higher levels, particularly in Middle Eastern and Far Eastern cultures (Leu et al. 2010, Joshonloo 2013, Özen 2019), necessitates a more detailed examination of how regional differences influence the perception of happiness and its psychological effects. Moreover, these findings have not been extensively discussed in literature (Joshanloo et al. 2014). In this context, the inclusion of research conducted in these regions in future studies may contribute to a more comprehensive global understanding of this phenomenon and provide important insights.

Another noteworthy point is that the examined studies focus on diverse range of objectives. This is an anticipated outcome, given the fact that the consequences of the fear of happiness are vital and can affect the lives of individuals in various ways (Türkmen and Sezer 2023, Elmas and Çevik 2024); however, additional studies are still required to fully understand the complex nature of the fear of happiness and its diverse impacts on individuals (Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020, De Vuyst et al. 2023). Future comprehensive research to examine this complex nature of the fear of happiness and its mechanisms of effect could provide significant information in terms of theoretical and practical perspective. Furthermore, to enhance understanding of fear of happiness's impact on mental health, increasing studies focused on developing valid and reliable scales that measure this complex phenomenon (Blasco-Belled et al. 2021) may yield more consistent results regarding its

assessment. Accordingly, the findings of the research can contribute to the design of effective intervention programs and the development of strategies for individuals to cope with the fear of happiness.

The examined studies involve diverse participant groups (including young adults, middle and high school students, teachers, pregnant women, mothers with children with special needs). This diversity can be interpreted as an endeavor to explore the impact of fear of happiness, a relatively novel concept in the literature, across various demographics and stages of life. The inclusion of different participant groups in the studies ensures broader representation in the research and facilitates understanding of how fear of happiness varies across age (Dobos et al. 2024), gender (Deniz et al. 2022), and cultural contexts (Joshano et al. 2014, Türk et al. 2017). This diversity is critical for interpreting the multidimensional nature of fear of happiness and for developing effective intervention strategies (Joshano et al. 2014). In this context, researchers need to conduct studies involving larger groups of participants, considering current findings and the experiences of individuals across various stages of life.

It was observed that university students were frequently preferred in the studies. University students are frequently selected as research participants, potentially due to their status as adults and their general accessibility (Kıyak and Kozan 2024). However, the majority of studies examined were conducted with non-clinical sample groups, which enhances the generalizability of findings but may be considered a limitation in terms of identifying psychological problems and developing intervention strategies. Further research on clinical groups is of significant importance to enhance the efficacy of intervention programs and strengthen psychological support processes (Öcek and Gürsoy 2007). Therefore, future studies should comprehensively examine various aspects of the fear of happiness, involving both clinical and non-clinical sample groups.

Moreover, while fear of happiness is generally regarded as a psychological pathology in Western societies, it may be perceived as a culturally ingrained behavior in Eastern societies, where expressing or seeking happiness can be considered socially inappropriate or selfish (Joshano and Weijers 2014). This distinction necessitates a more nuanced approach in future research that takes cultural differences into account. Therefore, future studies should not only focus on clinical and non-clinical populations but also examine cross-cultural perspectives on the fear of happiness in order to better understand how cultural norms shape psychological processes related to happiness.

The most frequently used scales in research are the Fear of Happiness Scale and the Life Satisfaction Scale (Joshano et al. 2014, Demirci et al. 2016, Türk et al. 2017, Yıldırım 2019, Belen and Barmanpek 2020, Tekke and Ceylan 2021, Elmas 2022). This is an anticipated result, since majority of the studies in the current review aimed to examine the effects of fear of happiness on life satisfaction. As the potential of the fear of happiness to reduce life satisfaction emerges as one of major issues in the realm of psychological health (Joshano 2013, Joshano et al. 2014, Türk et al. 2017, Yıldırım and Aziz 2017, Elmas 2022). Research show that fear of happiness can lead individuals to restrain their positive emotions and diminish their life satisfaction (Türk et al. 2017, Elmas and Çevik 2024). In addition, in the studies, it is noticed that various measurement tools were selected to assess the psychological states of the participant groups. Tools such as the "Child and Adolescent Psychological Resilience Scale" (Deniz et al. 2022) for high school students, the "Maslach Burnout Inventory" for burnout levels, and the "UCLA Loneliness Scale" for loneliness levels were employed in the studies (Dobos et al. 2024). This reveals that the measurement tools used in the studies vary according to the determined objectives and the characteristics of the participant groups. In addition, the various scales used by the researchers enable them to assess not only the fear of happiness, but also the overall psychological health of individuals through a broader perspective. It is suggested that future studies address the fear of happiness in a more comprehensive framework, considering the integration of various measurement tools. This approach can facilitate the development of more efficient and comprehensive strategies in the field of psychological health.

Research reveals that the fear of happiness has complex relationships with numerous psychological variables such as self-compassion (Ekşi et al. 2020), gratitude (Belen and Barmanpek 2020), well-being (Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020), and separation anxiety (Tekke and Ceylan 2021) thus providing an important projection to explore the impacts of fear of happiness on psychological health of individuals. The relationship between fear of happiness and negative psychological variables (e.g., depression and negative affect) underscores its role as a factor that significantly threatens individuals' mental health (Gilbert et al. 2014, Bloore et al. 2020, Jordan et al. 2021, Kock et al. 2023, Lyvers et al. 2023), while its relationship with positive psychological variables (e.g., psychological well-being and life satisfaction), demonstrates the necessity of assessing this issue within the psychological health domain (Yıldırım 2019, Belen et al. 2020). However, the conflicting findings between fear of happiness and certain variables (e.g., gender) (Deniz et al. 2022, Dobos et al. 2024) indicate that further

studies are required to elucidate how fear of happiness is shaped by social and cultural dynamics. Moreover, studies on certain variables (e.g., resilience and self-compassion) that play mediating roles in the relationship between fear of happiness and mental health (Yıldırım 2019, Ekşi et al. 2020) emphasize the importance of researchers considering these variables when developing intervention strategies. Therefore, incorporating these variables into future studies may enable the design of efficient interventions supporting the mental well-being of individuals.

This review has several limitations. Primarily, the research included in the review process is limited to the studies accessible through the designated databases; and thus, results in some studies might be disregarded. Since the current review involves studies written merely in Turkish or English and only those with accessible full texts, significant findings in other languages may have been overlooked. In addition, the fact that a large proportion of the studies examined consisted of a specific demographic group, such as university students, may confine the generalizability of the findings for different age groups or social segments. These limitations necessitate the utilization of more comprehensive and diverse data sources in following research.

Conclusion

This systematic review study presented notable findings by comprehensively reviewing current research on fear of happiness. The findings demonstrate that studies on the fear of happiness are increasing; however, they also suggest that additional research is required on the subject. Future studies should prioritize multinational investigations considering cultural diversity in order to better understand the relationship between cultural factors and fear of happiness. This approach will enable a more comprehensive analysis of the multidimensional aspects of the fear of happiness. Additionally, in conjunction with multinational studies, regional investigations focusing on Middle Eastern and Far Eastern cultures, where fear of happiness is observed at higher levels, should be expanded, and the findings should be comprehensively analyzed. These studies may elucidate how regional differences influence the perception of happiness and its associated psychological effects. Furthermore, such research may provide valuable theoretical and practical insights into the complex nature of fear of happiness and its underlying mechanisms. Besides, to enhance our understanding of the effects on mental health, increasing number of studies focusing on the development of valid and reliable scales that can measure this phenomenon may contribute to obtaining more consistent and reliable results. Conducting future research with larger groups of participants involving diverse age groups could enable a comprehensive consideration of various aspects of the fear of happiness. In addition, future research needs to consider cross-cultural perspectives, focusing on both clinical and non-clinical populations, in order to understand how different perceptions of fear of happiness and cultural norms shape psychological processes in Western and Eastern societies. Further studies of clinical groups can contribute to improving the effectiveness of intervention programs and strengthening psychological support processes. Deepening research in this field may lead to significant advances in mental health by strengthening individuals' capability to cope with the fear of happiness.

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