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- Aims & scope
- Journal information
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Print ISSN: 0362-3319 Online ISSN: 1873-5355

4 issues per year

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The Social Science Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ussj20

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To cite this article: Ramazan Akdoğan & Elif Çimşir (2020): Does insight lead to happiness through providing satisfaction in romantic relationships?, The Social Science Journal, DOI: 10.1080/03623319.2020.1773125

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2020.1773125

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THE SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL
https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2020.1773125

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Does insight lead to happiness through providing satisfaction in romantic relationships?

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ABSTRACT

Although most theories in psychology suggest that increased insight is associated with a happier life, research is rather limited as to how insight facilitates happiness. Because insight is believed to help individuals in different life areas, such as romantic relationships, it can be argued that it may facilitate happiness indirectly through relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the current study examines the mediating role of relationship satisfaction in the relationship between insight and happiness. The data was collected from 185 undergraduate students in committed relationships through the Insight Scale, the Relationship Assessment Scale and the Oxford Happiness Scale-Short Form. The results of the mediation analysis confirm that there is a significant relationship between insight and happiness and that relationship satisfaction partially mediates this relationship. These findings suggest that insight may lead to a happier life because of the instrumental role it may play in establishing and/or maintaining romantic relationships that are more satisfactory.

KEYWORDS

Insight; relationship satisfaction; happiness; well-being

Research has proved that not only objective conditions, such as physical and mental health (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2017; Weech-Maldonado et al., 2017), welfare, income or economic standards (e.g., Easterlin, 1995; Frey & Stutzer, 2010; Read et al., 2016), but also subjective factors, such as cognitive and motivational processes play a key role in acquiring and/or increasing well-being in life (Lyubomirsky, 2001). For example, emotional intelligence (Ye et al., 2019), mindfulness (Bajaj et al., 2019; Coo & Salanova, 2018), emotional stability (Bajaj et al., 2019), self-esteem (Bajaj et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2014) and personality characteristics, such as authenticity (Boyraz et al., 2014), extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness and positivity have been found to be positively associated with happiness (Lauriola & Iani, 2015). In addition, other subjective factors, such as perceptions of meaning in life and daily spiritual experiences have been found to contribute to happiness (Vela et al., 2015).

A number of researchers have investigated happiness and well-being through the lenses of major life domains and found that an increased level of satisfaction and/or harmony experienced in work (Chan & Wyatt, 2007; Cho & Tay, 2015; Lee et al., 2018), leisure life (Ateca-Amestoy et al., 2008; Spiers & Walker, 2009), social relationships (Amati et al., 2018) and family and romantic relationships (e.g., Gustavson et al., 2016; Hawkins & Booth, 2005) lead to an overall increase in well-being. Among these life domains, romantic relationships have attracted particular attention and have been frequently investigated with consideration of both subjective and objective conditions. For example, increased levels of education (Yıldız & Çevik, 2016), income (Rogers & DeBoer, 2001), and mental and physical health (Braithwaite et al., 2010) have been identified as significant predictors of romantic satisfaction. Factors that are highly subjective in nature, such as an individual's personality (Malouff et al., 2010; Park & MacDonald, 2019), past relationship experiences (Diamond et al., 2017)

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and expectations from a relationship (Busby et al., 2019) have also been found to shape an individual's romantic satisfaction and expectations. Other researchers have revealed positive cognitive and emotional processes, such as emotional intelligence (e.g., Anghel, 2016; Heidari, Shahbazi, Ghafourifard, & Ali Sheikhi, 2017; Lavalekar et al., 2010; Özbiçer & Atıcı, 2018), self-esteem (Yadalijamaloye et al., 2013), and problem-solving skills (Johnson et al., 2005) to be positively correlated with romantic satisfaction. More importantly, research findings have frequently supported the proposition that, similar to those of happiness and well-being, certain conditions of objective contributors of romantic satisfaction are open to be manipulated by the individual's subjective perceptions, preferences and cognitive processes. For example, Walker (2019) revealed an interesting finding that having an extramarital affair is associated with increased life satisfaction for many married people, through making it possible for them to remain in their marriages, contrary to the popular belief that an affair is connected to decreased life satisfaction.

This important role of subjective processes in achieving happiness seems to suggest a potential connection between happiness and insight, which is theoretically described as an individual's awareness of her/his objective and subjective conditions (Murdock, 2013). Akdoğan & Türküm (2014, 2018)), who developed an insight scale for non-clinical university students, explain insight as a construct that indicates inspecting one's own cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes and their impact on each other, on one's own self, and on surrounding individuals and circumstances. Based on these explanations, a comprehensive definition of insight can be made as the awareness, understanding and evaluation of one's own emotions, thoughts, behavior, and their current and past causes, as well as the objective conditions surrounding the individual in terms of their impact on her/his past and current life experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that regardless of the different methods and techniques they apply in practice, most theories of psychology agree that gaining insight is a precondition for happiness (see Corey, 1996; Murdock, 2013). In addition, research has shown that insight is positively associated with life satisfaction (e.g., Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Lyke, 2009) and that certain constituents of insight, such as self-acceptance, have been shown to predict a happier life (e.g., Makino & Tagami, 1998; Xu et al., 2014).

Insight has been recently proposed to feature certain elements that are related to concepts, such as a holistic view, a self-acceptance and a self-understanding (see Akdoğan & Türküm, 2014; Akdoğan & Türküm, 2018), which indicate that insight does not only require an awareness, acceptance and understanding of one's own self, but also an awareness of surrounding individuals and events (Creed & Funder, 1998; Hamachek, 2000). On the other hand, insight still remains as a theoretically abstract and complex construct to utilize in the lives of non-clinical populations, despite being consistently recognized as a precursor to happiness. As a result, a number of theoreticians suggest that insight alone is not sufficient to attain a happy life, unless it is supported by action (for a review, see Akdoğan & Turkum, 2014). For example, for someone who realizes that the cause of her/his unhappiness is marriage, having an increased level of insight does not just involve establishing this connection. The individual has to try new strategies to save her/his marriage or get a divorce, if she/he believes that the marriage is not salvageable, to be able to claim to have increased insight.

This is consistent with the proposition that insight provides happiness because it directs people to better life choices and/or to strategies that make it more possible to achieve satisfaction in the areas of those life choices (see Barron, 2012; Cimsir, 2019). Being considered an important life decision that one makes, identifying a suitable romantic partner can be listed among these life choices, where increased insight may be instrumental. Insight may also be helpful in maintaining a satisfactory romantic relationship by helping an individual successfully address the emotional and relational needs of a romantic partner. As a result, having an increased level of insight can elevate a person's level of relationship satisfaction, which it is possible to define as a subjective assessment of a romantic relationship based on the feelings that one has towards her/his partner and the overall relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). These formulations connect insight, not only to relationship satisfaction, but also to a happier life, as relationship satisfaction and happiness have been repeatedly shown to be associated (e.g., Dyrdal et al., 2011; Heller et al., 2006; Lance et al., 1995). Therefore, it

seems logical to assume that there may be a relationship between insight and happiness that might be mediated by relationship satisfaction.

Current study

Although limited, previous research has revealed an association between insight and a positive well-being (e.g., Cimsir, 2019; Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Lyke, 2009), leaving it to further research to reveal the underlying mechanism of the contribution that insight provides to a happier life. To date, only one study has been conducted with consideration of the potential role of insight in increased well-being, revealing that insight is connected to increased life satisfaction through an increased level of academic major satisfaction among a group of college students (Cimsir, 2019). This has provided partial support for the theoretical explanations that insight might increase overall well-being through helping individuals make suitable life choices and use better strategies to achieve satisfaction in the areas of their choices (see Barron, 2012; Cimsir, 2019). On the other hand, none of the other important life domains, such as romantic relationships, has been considered by research as a potential facilitator of the relationship between insight and happiness. Given that romantic relationships are an important life area, where increased insight might facilitate greater satisfaction, thereby leading to increased happiness with one's overall life, this study is designed to examine whether or not insight is associated with increased happiness through relationship satisfaction. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to investigate if there is a significant relationship between insight and happiness, and to reveal whether relationship satisfaction plays a mediator role in this potential relationship.

Method

Study design

In this descriptive cross-sectional study, involving a convenient sampling procedure, we examine, through a mediational model, whether and how insight facilitates happiness. Upon acquiring permission from the University Institutional Review Board, data was collected in a paper and pencil format from 188 volunteer students in several classrooms at two public universities in Turkey. Volunteering for and completing the study indicated consent.

Setting and participants

The total number of participants that were included in the main analyses of this study was 185 (130 females, 55 males) undergraduate students of two large public universities, located at Izmir and Eskisehir in Turkey. Most of the participants were attending programs at the Faculty of Education (N = 153), although there were participants (N = 32) attending programs at other faculties, such as Sports and Health. The sample consisted of 62 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 25 juniors and 33 senior students, with a mean age of 21.58 (SD = 2.99). The majority of the participants (179) were unmarried, but were in committed relationships, except for two participants who reported being married and four participants who reported being engaged. The mean relationship duration was 2.14 (SD = 1.47) years, ranging from between one and nine years.

Measures

Insight Scale for Non-Clinical University Students (ISNUS)

Developed originally in Turkish by Akdoğan and Türküm (2018), the ISNUS is a 20-item self-report measure of insight, asking respondents to identify the degree of descriptiveness of each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The scale has three factors labelled,

Holistic View (e.g., I consider the potential consequences before I behave in a certain way), Self-Acceptance (e.g., I take responsibility for my behavior), and Self-Understanding (e.g., I try to see if my behavior is affected by my emotions), which produce a total score ranging from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating an increase in insight. The results of a confirmatory analysis (RMSEA =.053, GFI = .90, CFI = .90, SRMR = .059) conducted by Akdoğan and Türküm (2018) support the validity of the ISNUS with an explained variance of 45.24%. The authors also report a Cronbach's coefficient of .84 (in the current study, Cronbach's a = .81) and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .84 that was calculated within a 6-week interval. The scale was also reported to have good convergent validity with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; r = 0.64) and the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; r = 0.49; Akdoğan & Türküm, 2018). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the scale was reported as 0.84, which is found to be 0.80 in the present study.

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)

Being a shorter version of the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI), the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was originally an 8-item measure of a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting increased happiness (Hills & Argyle, 2002). Sample items of the OHQ include, 'I am well satisfied about everything in my life,' and, 'I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am'. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the original scale was reported as 0.91. The OHQ was adapted to Turkish by Doğan and Çötok (2011) in a sample of 532 college students with good reliability and validity. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the Turkish version was found as 0.74; in the present sample, Cronbach's a = 0.73. The Turkish version of the questionnaire involves seven items that are scored on a 6 point Likert scale, as one item was found not to operate well within the Turkish sample (Doğan & Çötok, 2011).

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

RAS is a 7-item measure of global relationship satisfaction rated on a 5-point Likert scale (Hendrick, 1988). The possible score range on the RAS scale varies between 7 and 35, with higher scores indicating higher relationship satisfaction. Sample items of the RAS include, 'To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations' and, 'How well does your partner meet your needs'. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the original scale was reported as .86. The RAS was adapted to Turkish by Curun (2001) on a sample of 140 college students with good reliability and validity. The Turkish version of the RAS scale was re-structured as a 7-point Likert scale, producing scores ranging from 7 to 49. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Turkish version of the RAS was calculated as .86, and was found to be .81 in the present study. The RAS scale was chosen in this study because of its brief structure and ability to measure satisfaction experienced in any partnered relationship, rather than being limited to the satisfaction experienced by married couples.

Results

Preliminary analysis and descriptive statistics

Data cleaning/screening procedures were conducted through an IBM SPSS-24. The missing data was equal to only 0.17% of all values. The Chi-square value of 244.39 (df = 229; p = .23) indicates that the pattern was random, so the missing data was completed through the Expectation Maximization Algorithm imputation procedure (see Schlomer et al., 2010). The kurtosis and skewness values of the study variables were consistent with a normal distribution, except for the scores of relationship satisfaction, which is the mediator of this study. Because the SPSS PROCESS macro that was used in the mediation analysis uses the bootstrap method for the calculation of an indirect effect, the non-normal distribution of the mediator does not pose any problem (see Hayes, 2013). The data was also checked for assumptions of multiple linear regression (see Field, 2009) given that mediation analysis is conducted through a regression-based approach in the PROCESS macro. No problems were

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables (N = 188).

	M	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	2	3	4	5	6
1. Insight	76.79	8.28	−.41	.87	.20*	.26**	−.05	.08	−.03
2. Relationship Satisfaction	41.67	5.99	−1.03	1.19		.24*	.00	−.02	−.07
3. Happiness	24.21	4.42	−.42	.06			−.08	.02	.00
4. Relationship Duration	2.14	1.47	1.67	3.31				-	-
5. Age	21.58	2.99	1.84	3.98					-
6. Gender	-	-	-	-					

*p <.01, **p <.001 Skewness Standard Error =.179; Kurtosis Standard Error =.355.

identified, except for three cases that had Mahalanobis distance values greater than the critical value of 13.82 (df = 2), indicating a multivariate normality problem. After elimination of these three cases, further analyses were conducted with the remaining 185 participants. Table 1 shows correlations between the variables and the descriptive statistics.

As can be seen in Table 1, happiness was found to be significantly associated with both insight (r = .26; $p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction (r = .24; $p < .01$). In addition, there is a significant relationship between insight and relationship satisfaction (r = .20; $p < .01$). On the other hand, no significant correlations were detected between the demographic variables (i.e., gender, age and relationship duration) and the variables of main interest (i.e., insight, relationship satisfaction, and happiness). None of the demographic variables given in Table 1 was, therefore, controlled in the mediation model.

Mediating effect of relationship satisfaction on the relationship between insight and happiness

The mediating effect of relationship satisfaction in the relationship between insight and happiness was investigated through the SPSS PROCESS macro, introduced by Hayes (2013). Figure 1 depicts the paths of the mediation model, where *a*, *b*, *c*, and *c*′ show the associated path coefficients.

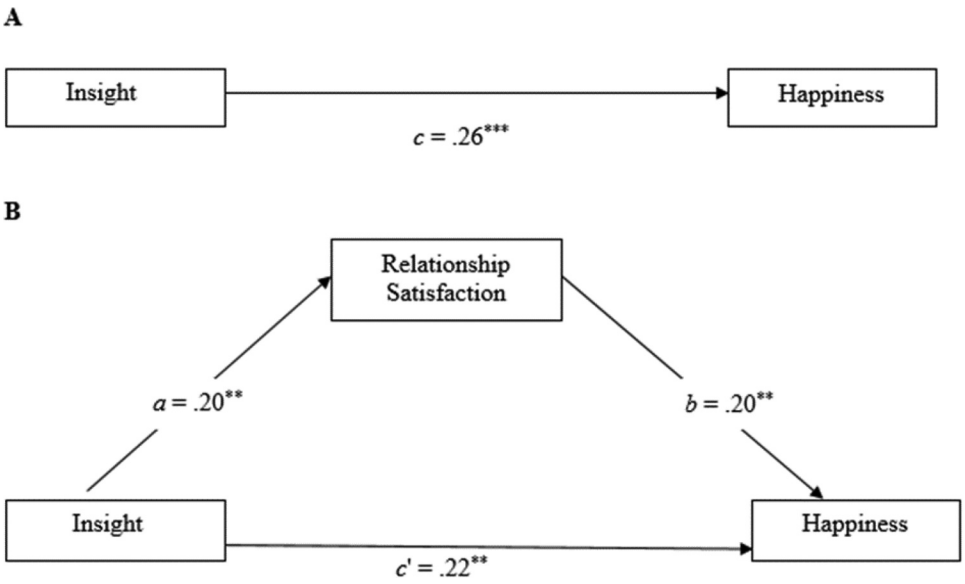


Figure 1. Mediation of relationship satisfaction between insight and happiness and standardized coefficients.

**p <.01, ***p <.001

Table 2. Total, direct and indirect effects of insight on happiness through relationship satisfaction.

	Coefficients				95% Bias Corrected Confidence Interval	
Effects	Standardized Coefficients	SE	t	p	Lower	Upper
Total Effect	.2631	.0381	3.6892	.0003***	.0318	.2631
Direct Effect	.2232	.0382	3.1217	.0021**	.0270	.2232
Indirect Effect	.0399[a]	.0222[a]			.0043[a]	.0895[a]

(N = 188) *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001 [a]5000 bootstrap sample.

Figure 1a shows that although the standardized path coefficient between insight and happiness (*c*) is 0.26 ($p < .001$), it decreases to 0.22 (i.e., *c*', $p < .01$) when relationship satisfaction is introduced into the analysis as a mediator, as shown in Figure 1b. Figure 1b also depicts that the standardized path coefficient between insight and relationship satisfaction, (a) 0.20 ($p < .01$), and the standardized path coefficient between relationship satisfaction and happiness, (b) 0.20 ($p < .01$) are both significant. The mediation effect of relationship satisfaction (a x b = 0.04), is also significant since the 5000 bootstrap method, suggested by Hayes (2013) for yielding more accurate results than classical methods, shows that the 95% confidence interval [lower 0.004, upper 0.09] does not include zero (see Hayes, 2013). On the other hand, although both the path coefficient, and the significance of the path coefficient between insight and happiness, decreases when relationship satisfaction is added to the model as a mediator, the standardized direct effect (*c*') = 0.22 ($p < .01$) is still significant, indicating the existence of a partial mediation effect (see Baron & Kenny, 1986).

To summarize, the research findings demonstrate that there is a significant partial indirect effect of insight on happiness through relationship satisfaction. Additionally, the model with insight and relationship satisfaction (as the mediator) significantly explains 11% (F_{2-182}) = 10.91, $p < .001$) of the total variance in happiness, which was initially 4% (F_{1-183}) = 7.7, $p < .01$) with insight as the only predictor of happiness. Table 2 shows the coefficients regarding the total, direct and indirect effects.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationships among the variables of insight, romantic relationship satisfaction and happiness, with a particular focus on the mediating role of romantic relationship satisfaction in a potential connection between insight and happiness. The findings demonstrate that happiness is significantly associated with both insight (r = .26) and romantic relationship satisfaction (r = .24). Although the positive relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and positive well-being has already been well-established in previous research (e.g., Gustavson et al., 2016; Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Heller et al., 2006; Yıldız & Çevik, 2016), there has been limited research regarding a connection between insight and happiness in non-clinical populations. In fact, to our knowledge, only three studies (e.g., Cimsir, 2019; Harrington & Loffredo, 2010; Lyke, 2009) exist that have investigated the nature of the relationship between insight and positive well-being. This study is therefore important in terms of lending further support to the contention that insight contributes to a happier life (Corey, 1996; Murdock, 2013), through being helpful in certain areas of life, such as romantic relationships.

Another finding of this study is the existence of a mediator role of romantic relationship satisfaction in the relationship between insight and happiness, suggesting that relationship satisfaction does play a significant role in the positive impact of insight on happiness. This is consistent with our initial conceptualization that romantic relationships might be one area of life where increased insight might lead to greater satisfaction, resulting in increased happiness. This indicates that despite appearing an abstract and complex construct, insight might be practical in different life domains, such as romantic relationships, indirectly leading to greater happiness. In fact, insight has also recently been found to contribute to life satisfaction through increasing academic major satisfaction of college students (Cimsir, 2019). Therefore, the results of this study extend our understanding into

the merits of insight in the different life domains of nonclinical populations. This finding is also in line with previous research connecting positive cognitive and emotional processes, such as emotional intelligence (e.g., Bricker, 2005; Heidari, Shahbazi, Ghafourifard, & Sheikhi, 2017), mindfulness (Barnes et al., 2007) and problem-solving skills (Güven & Sevim, 2016; Johnson et al., 2005) to increased relationship/marital satisfaction.

As suggested, the findings of this study highlight insight as an important contributor of both relationship satisfaction and happiness. Therefore, it is important that individuals are aware of their own cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes and their interactions, as well as the impact of these on an individual's own self and surrounding individuals (Creed & Funder, 1998; Hamachek, 2000; also see Akdoğan and Türküm, 2014). This can help individuals choose compatible partners and/or develop fruitful strategies to manage their romantic relationships. Having satisfying romantic relationships that can be achieved through increased insight, in turn, seems likely to increase overall happiness. On the other hand, it should be noted that this mediation is only a partial mediation, which may mean that satisfaction in romantic relationships might also be associated with circumstances and qualities other than an individual's own inner processes, such as insight. For example, certain attitudes and qualities of a romantic partner might increase one's relationship satisfaction, even when she/he is on the lower end of the insight spectrum and vice versa. Providing further support for this reasoning, most marital and/or relationship satisfaction scales, including the RAS used in this study as a measure of romantic relationship satisfaction, measure the level of romantic/marital satisfaction with particular reference to the attitudes and behavior of a romantic partner. As a result, it is also possible that individuals who are compatible in their levels of insight might also have similar actions toward and expectations from each other, resulting in increased levels of relationship satisfaction regardless of the levels of insight. This might also explain the lack of a full mediation of relationship satisfaction. It is also possible that an increase in an individual's insight level may have more impact on her/his partner's relationship satisfaction level, rather than on her/his own. Given that this study exclusively utilizes individual (vs. couple) data, studies looking at the impact of a partner's insight level on an individual's relationship satisfaction and happiness may, therefore, find the full mediation effect.

The current study also has certain limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings and planning further research. One limitation of the study relates to the relatively small sample size (N = 185) that may have limited the effectiveness of the statistical methods used in the study. Although the bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval used in the mediation analysis has been suggested to be robust to validity and power issues, studies conducted with samples smaller than 200 (Hayes, 2013; Hayes & Scharkow, 2013) are recommended to increase their sample sizes to have increased power (Fritz et al., 2015). Another limitation might be the potential impact of social desirability bias, which can increase or decrease true relationships in studies such as this, where self-evaluation tools are used in the data collection process (Ganster et al., 1983). As a result, it is possible that participants may have overestimated their insight levels due to a social desirability effect. Therefore, future studies could collect supplemental data from the partners of participants in order to see a more accurate picture of the impact of insight on romantic relationships. An alternative might be the insertion of a social desirability scale into data collection tools to cancel out any potential social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design of the study design can be suggested as another limitation, as it does not warrant causal inferences, so that any idea about the directionality of associations may not go beyond speculation. Future studies could use longitudinal designs to eliminate this limitation.

The sample consisting of college students can be suggested as another limitation of the current study, as it may limit the generalizability of the results to the general population. It should be taken into account that the mean of the relationship satisfaction scores (41.67), in this study, appears to be at the high end considering that the highest score that can be attained from the Relationship Assessment Scale is 49. It is possible that the spread of the relationship satisfaction scores may be closer to a normal distribution in an older age group consisting of married

individuals, as well as unmarried individuals. On the other hand, in the sample (college students) used in this study, the spread may be negatively skewed because the majority of the participants seem to be in the honeymoon phase of their relationships, given the average relationship duration that is at the low end mean of relationship duration (2.14). Therefore, it may be possible for the mediation effect of relationship satisfaction, on the relationship between insight and happiness, to be stronger in an older age group. To better assert validity, future studies could include participants from the specific age group to which the study results are desired to be applicable.

Highlights

- Insight is associated with both relationship satisfaction and happiness.
- Insight and relationship satisfaction are significant predictors of happiness.
- The relationship between insight and happiness is partially mediated by relationship satisfaction.
- Insight may lead to a happier life because of the important role it may play in establishing and/or maintaining romantic relationships that are more satisfactory.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

Funding

This study was funded by the Anadolu University Research Initiative Project under Grant [number 1805E149].

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