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## SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Suppression effect of social awareness in the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction

Eyüp Çelik<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** The aim of the study was to investigate the suppression effect of social awareness in the self-concealment and adolescents' life satisfaction relationship. Data were collected with the Satisfaction with Life Scale, Social Awareness Scale which is a sub-scale of The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale, and Self-concealment Scale, which were completed by 368 adolescents who age range is 12–16. Regression analysis demonstrated that social awareness has a suppression effect in the self-concealment and life satisfaction relationship. Results showed that self-concealment was negatively related to life satisfaction, but social awareness was positively related to both self-concealment and life satisfaction. The relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction increases when social awareness was added to the regression analysis.

**Subjects:** Behavioral Sciences; Education; Social Sciences

**Keywords:** life satisfaction; suppression effect; social awareness; self-concealment; adolescent

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Eyüp Çelik is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Sciences of Sakarya University in Turkey now. He is interested in many aspects of psychology. To date, he has mainly worked on various topics related to the mental health of adolescents and married individuals, such as marital adjustment, married life satisfaction, sexuality, sensation seeking, adolescent and young life satisfaction, self-concealment, and career development. This perspective article, which describes the suppression effect of social awareness in the relationship between the self-concealment and the life satisfaction, belongs to the mental health of the adolescent.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The life satisfaction and social awareness positively affect the mental health, protect people from psychological distress. If adolescents have higher life satisfaction and social awareness level, they can have healthy development with less negative effect of this stormy period. The article describes some of the positive effects of social awareness and negative effects of self-concealment on the life satisfaction of adolescents. The present study revealed that the social awareness prevents the adverse effect of the self-concealment on adolescents' life satisfaction level. Clearly, although self-concealment has a profound negative effect on the psychological health, social awareness has a profound positive effect on the psychological health of adolescents. Understanding these effects can improve psycho-education programs and educational policies for increasing the social awareness of adolescents. Exploration of the effect of the social awareness on the life satisfaction can also lead to families and teachers, in order to protect adolescents from the negative effect of self-concealment.

## 1. Introduction

Childhood and adolescence are important development periods for mental health. Hence, variables increasing positive mental health in adolescence, such as social awareness and life satisfaction should be investigated. In this context, the present study is crucial because it focuses on adolescent life satisfaction and variables affecting life satisfaction such as self-concealment and social awareness. Self-concealment may affect negative aspect adolescence development and their physical and mental health, but social awareness and life satisfaction may affect positive aspects of their development, and they may prevent psychopathology in adolescents.

Life satisfaction is a crucial factor for psychological and physical health (Hirdes & Forbes, 1993) and increased life span and reduces death rate (Bowling & Grundy, 2009; Mete, 2005). Furthermore, it is a key dimension of subjective well-being (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Life satisfaction is an information-based evaluation of the worth of one's life, and it is a judgment whether individuals' life circumstances fulfill their expectations (Pavot & Diener, 1993). When the person reports being satisfied with life, s/he is most likely comparing his/her perceived life circumstances with a set of self-imposed standards, and is satisfied with the degree that these conditions match those standards (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993).

Researches about adolescent life satisfaction focus on social factors such as school (Çelik, Arıcı Özcan, & Turan, 2014; Doğan & Çelik, 2014; Gilman, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000; Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006), family (Petito & Cummins, 2000), and peers (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004). However, there is no study examining the effect of self-concealment and social awareness on life satisfaction. However, one of the most important variable effecting adolescents' life satisfaction may be social awareness and self-concealment.

Social awareness is defined by Goleman (2006) as being aware of what others feel and think. It is crucial to speak up against social injustice, consciousness-raising about the other being social activities, develop the ability to manage the negative emotions that the conflict can create (Greene & Kamimura, 2003), and the development of critical thinking skills, become aware of important relationships and the significance of social interaction (Tsui, 2000). Social interaction with others develops individuals' social and cognitive skills. When interacting with various people, individuals are able to engage in controversy and actively cope with the differences between their own perspective and that of others (Piaget, 1975 cited in Greene & Kamimura, 2003).

Social awareness might positively influence social behaviors, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and it might also assist with individuals in coping with challenges in establishing and maintaining relationships. Interpersonal relationships have been found to be linked with good mental and physical health and life satisfaction, but lack of interpersonal connections is linked negatively to outcomes including depression (Perlman, 2007). Social awareness may positively affect the development of social behaviors, which defined as the physical and verbal acts that individuals exhibit while interacting with others (Doctoroff, Greer, & Arnold, 2006), and it helps manage emotions (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Parrott, 2002). Furthermore, individuals who are higher social awareness have lower depression symptoms (Doğan, 2006). Finally, social awareness may be a factor influencing life satisfaction positively because the above mentioned literature review demonstrated that social awareness decreases individuals' depression symptoms (e.g. fatigue and decreased energy, feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism), and facilitates social interaction with others, critical thinking skills and the ability to manage the negative emotions.

Another variable effecting life satisfaction may be self-concealment because subjective well-being (Wang, Qi, & Cui, 2014) and mental health (Almas, Grusec, & Tackett, 2011) are affected by self-concealment, and also it increases negative self-esteem, anxiety, and depression levels (Almas et al., 2011). However, self-concealment positively related to suicidal behaviors, depression, (Friedlander, Nazem, Fiske, Nadorff, & Smith, 2012), and psychological distress (Leleux-Labarge, Hatton, Goodnight, & Masuda, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that individuals with higher

self-concealment are unwilling to use social and psychological support resources (Barry & Mizrahi, 2005; Cepeda-Benito & Short, 1998).

Self-concealment is explained as a constant behavioral propensity to keep distressing and potentially embarrassing private information from others (Friedlander et al., 2012; Hu, Wang, & Wu, 2013; Larson & Chastain, 1990; Masuda & Latzman, 2012). “Self-concealment is also different from low self-disclosure, in that self-concealment implies that a person is hiding information that is distressing, whereas low self-disclosure implies only that a person is not volunteering information that is private.” (Fisher, 1984 cited in Friedlander et al., 2012, p. 332). Higher self-concealment was associated with fear of disclosing personal information to others, which, in turn, discouraged seeking counseling (Kim & Yoo, 2002; Shin & Ahn, 2005). Similarly, Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998) stated that higher self-concealers are less probable to seek professional help. Furthermore, studies (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Uysal, Lee Lin, & Raymond Knee, 2010) demonstrated that the level of psychological well-being decreased when self-concealment level increased. In this context, self-concealment may negatively impact on adolescents’ life satisfaction because the studies (Guney, Kalafat, & Boysan, 2010; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Kaprio, Honkanen, Viinamäki, & Koskenvuo, 2004; Rustøen, Cooper, & Miaskowski, 2010) demonstrated that variables associated with self-concealment (e.g. depression, anxiety and psychological distress) reduce life satisfaction.

### **1.1. Present study**

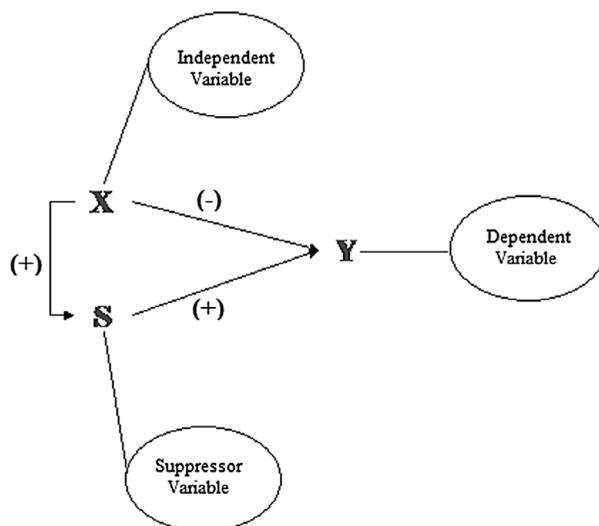
The adolescent is believed to be crucial for individuals’ development because significant changes have taken place during adolescence, such as puberty and mental development; a person finds out more about themselves, such as their sexuality, social identity, new behaviors for various challenging situations, and likes or dislikes. In this important period of life, if individuals choose lower self-concealment and higher social awareness, they can live lower depression symptoms, engage social activities and receive social support because all of them associate with greater well-being and lower perception of stress, according to the researchers (Nickerson & Nagle, 2004; Petito & Cummins, 2000), which all of them may lead to life satisfaction.

Self-concealment may impede adolescents’ life satisfaction because it is positively correlated with the variables that decrease the life satisfaction level, such as feelings of social isolation from peers and others (Masuda, Anderson, & Sheehan, 2009), psychological distress (Kelly & Yip, 2006), and factors that destructive to well-being (Major & Gramzow, 1999; Potoczniak, Aldea, & DeBlaere, 2007; Uysal et al., 2010), and depression (Friedlander et al., 2012). However, as seen previous studies’ results, social awareness may positively affect life satisfaction because it positively affects to develop the social behaviors (Doctoroff et al., 2006), the ability to manage the negative emotions (Greene & Kamimura, 2003), and critical thinking skills (Tsui, 2000), whereas self-concealment negatively affects life satisfaction because it negatively affects subjective well-being (Wang et al., 2014), mental and physical health (Almas et al., 2011). In this context, even if adolescents have higher social awareness level, the predictive power of self-concealment on life satisfaction may be lower than expected, because the self-concealment and life satisfaction relationship might be suppressed by social awareness that leads to development of social behaviors (Doctoroff et al., 2006), the ability to deal with negative emotions (Greene & Kamimura, 2003), critical thinking skills (Tsui, 2000), and establishing and maintaining relationships (Goleman, 2006). Furthermore, social awareness increases the quality of interpersonal relationships, but it decreases depression symptoms (Doğan, 2006).

Although self-concealment adversely affects adolescents’ life satisfaction levels, the predictive power of self-concealment on life satisfaction can decrease due to the artifact effect of social awareness. Because this artifact effect might include some variables associated with social awareness such as the ability to deal with negative emotions, critical thinking skills, and quality of interpersonal relationships. Before accounting for the suppression variable (social awareness), the total effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction might appear to be lower, but that would not be an accurate description of the effect of self-concealment on the life satisfaction. Because the social awareness weakens the effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction by its omission, social awareness can,

**Figure 1. Conceptual diagram of the hypothesis model.**

Notes: X: Self-concealment, S: Social Awareness, Y: Life Satisfaction.



unless controlled for, cause to decrease both total and direct effects of self-concealment on life satisfaction. Thus, as shown Figure 1, the present study hypothesized that a social awareness has a negative suppression effect on the self-concealment and adolescents' life satisfaction relationship.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Data were gathered from a sample of 368 participants. Their age ranges are from 12 to 16 years. Convenience sampling was used in choosing the sample because they are willing and available to be studied (Creswell, 2002). Of the participants, 47% were female and 53% were male. Participants voluntarily filled in questionnaires. Participants who were studying in Istanbul formed the study group of this research. Researchers administered the self-report measures to the students in the classroom environment.

### 2.2. Measures

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The measure was by developed Diener et al. (1985) and Durak, Senol-Durak, and Gencoz (2010) adapted it into Turkish. SWLS is self-report measure, including 5-item relevant life satisfaction, and there have no sub-scales its. The SWLS is 7-point Likert-type (1 = *very strongly disagree* and 7 = *very strongly agree*). The scale scores are the sum of the items. The scores can range from 5 (low level of life satisfaction) to 35 (high level of life satisfaction). The construct validity of the Turkish form of the scale was examined with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The result of CFA revealed that the scale was a single factor structure as the original. Furthermore, model obtaining from CFA is valid and shows acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 2.026$ , TLI = .98, RMSEA = .043, IFI = .99, CFI = .99). Cronbach alpha coefficient of Turkish form of this measure was found .81 in adaptation study, and it was .76 in the present study.

Self-concealment Scale. Larson and Chastain (1990) developed the scale, and Deniz and Çok (2010) adapted it into Turkish. It is a ten-item self-report measure rated at 5-point Likert-type (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*), and there have no sub-scales its. The range of possible scores is from 10 (low level of self-concealment) to 50 (high level of self-concealment). The sum of the items shows self-concealment level. The construct validity of the Turkish form of the scale was investigated with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and CFA. As the original form of the scale, EFA revealed a single factor structure and factor loadings ranged from .51 to .74, and this single factor structure explained 43.76% of the total variance. The result of CFA revealed that the scale was a single factor structure as the original. Furthermore, model obtaining from CFA is valid and shows

acceptable fit indices (RMSEA = .07, CFI = .97, AGFI = .89, GFI = .93). Cronbach alpha coefficient of the Turkish form of this measure was found .86 in adaptation study, and it was .84 in the present study.

The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale. Silvera, Martinussen, and Dahl (2001) developed the scale and Doğan and Çetin (2009) adapted it into Turkish. The Tromso Social Intelligence Scale which includes three sub-scales (The Social Information Process, The Social Skill, and Social Awareness). The Social Awareness Sub-scale was used in this study. It is a seven-item scale rated at 5-point Likert-type (1 = *extremely lacking in confidence* and 5 = *extremely confident*). The range of possible scores is from 7 (low level) to 35 (high level). The social awareness scale assesses “*the ability of active behaving in accordance with the situation, place, and time*” (Doğan & Çetin, 2009, p. 713). The sum of the items shows social awareness level. The construct validity of the Turkish form of the Social Intelligence Scale was investigated with EFA and CFA. As the original form of the scale, EFA demonstrated that the Turkish form of the scale is three-factor structure and its factor loadings were ranged from .30 to .85. Three-factor structure explained 44.79% of the total variance. The result of CFA revealed that the scale was three-factor structure as the original. Furthermore, model obtained from CFA is valid and shows acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 621.26$ ,  $N = 719$ ,  $p = .00$ , RMSEA = .057, NFI = .92, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, RFI = .91, GFI = .92, and AGFI = .91). The internal consistency coefficient was .67 in adaptation study, and it is .79 in the present study. Flynn, Schroeder, and Sakakibara (1994) indicated that .60 and above internal consistency coefficient is acceptable reliability level for a scale. In this context, the scales used in this study have acceptable reliability level.

### 2.3. Data analysis

The present study examined suppression effect of self-concealment in the relationship between social awareness and life satisfaction. “A suppression is defined as a third variable that increases the regression coefficient between the independent and dependent variables by its inclusion in a regression equation” (Conger, 1974 cited in Cheung & Lau, 2008, p. 299). That is, the suppression variable covers-up or suppressed the variance of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Suppression totally uncovers the results that would never be found out on the basis of investigating solely bivariate relationships. One of the most important advantages of the suppression variables is to increase the prediction of the criterion. via this process, the irrelevant variance in the other predictor variable(s) are eliminated. In that way, a more compendious estimate of the predictor-criterion relationship can be obtained (Lancaster, 1999). Three definitional suppression variables,  $X_{2c}$ ,  $X_{2n}$ , and  $X_{2r}$  were explicated by Lancaster (1999). The classical suppression,  $X_{2c}$ , has a zero correlation with  $Y$  and a positive correlation with  $X_1$ . The negative suppression,  $X_{2n}$ , has a positive correlation with both  $Y$  and  $X_1$ , while  $X_{2r}$ , the reciprocal suppression, is negatively correlated with  $X_1$  but has a relatively higher correlation with  $Y$ . Suppression is seldom to be examined in psychological studies, none the less, use of suppression may make contribution to the theoretical development. The Sobel test was used to examine if the suppressive effect of social awareness is statistically significant in the adolescent life satisfaction and self-concealment relationship. In this context, the SPSS version of the PROCESS was used to determine the suppression effect of social awareness in the relationships between self-concealment and life satisfaction using the SPSS 20.0 statistical software package.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Associations between study variables

The means, standard deviations of the variables and their inter-correlations are presented in Table 1. Consistent with our hypotheses, the relationships between social awareness, self-concealment, and life satisfaction are significant. Life satisfaction was positively correlated with social awareness; however, it negatively associated with self-concealment (Table 1).

### 3.2. Suppression effect of self-concealment

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 2, regression analysis showed that social awareness significantly predicted life satisfaction (Coeff. =  $-.26$ , 95% CI:  $-.33$ – $-.20$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations**

Variables	1	2	3
Life satisfaction	1		
Self-concealment	-.39**	1	
Social awareness	.39**	.12*	1
M	20.39	26.92	23.94
SD	6.03	8.91	4.19

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

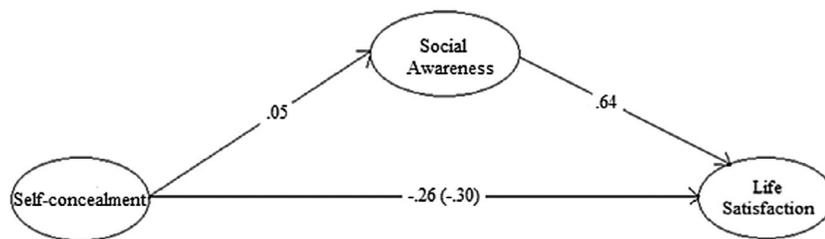
**Table 2. Regression coefficients, standard errors and significance tests for the regression model**

Predictor	Coeff.	SE	t	p	F	R <sup>2</sup>
Constant	25.58	.92	29.91	<.001		
Self-concealment	-.26	.03	-8.22	<.001	67.58	.15

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 3, the regression analysis showed that social awareness significantly and positively predicted self-concealment (Coeff. = .06, 95% CI: .01-.10;  $p < .05$ ), and it also significantly and positively predicted life satisfaction (Coeff. = -.30, 95% CI: -.36--.24;  $p < .001$ ). Social awareness significantly and positively predicted life satisfaction (Coeff. = .64, 95% CI: .52-.76;  $p < .001$ ). When social awareness was added to the regression analysis, the core effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction increased (from -.26 to -.30), and  $R^2$  increased from 15 to 35.

As can be seen, social awareness has suppression role in the self-concealment and life satisfaction relationship ( $Z = 2.27, p < .05$ ). Furthermore, the total effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction is -.26, direct effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction is -.30, and indirect effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction is .04 ( $p < .001$ ). Finally, when social awareness was included in the regression equation, the validity of the overall model increased. Thus, it appears that social awareness suppressed the life satisfaction and self-concealment relationship, and when this suppression effect was taken into account, we could more reliably estimate the true relationship between life satisfaction and self-concealment.

**Figure 2. Suppression effect of social awareness.**



**Table 3. Mediation model coefficients**

Predictors		Consequent						
		Social awareness			c'	Life satisfaction		
	a	Coeff.	SE	p		b	Coeff.	SE
Self-concealment	a	.05	.02	<.05	c'	-.30	.03	<.001
Social awareness		-	-	-	b	.64	.06	<.001
Constant	i <sub>1</sub>	22.41	.69	<.001	i <sub>2</sub>	13.17	1.58	>.001
$R^2 = .02$					$R^2 = .35$			
$F(1,366) = 5.46, p = .02$					$F(2,365) = 99.61, p = .000$			

#### 4. Discussion

The results demonstrated that self-concealment and social awareness are significant associate with life satisfaction, and they also significantly predict life satisfaction. These results seem to be consistent with the hypotheses of the present study as well as consistent with the findings in other studies (Çelik, 2015; Wang et al., 2014; Wismeijer & van Assen, 2008). Furthermore, the finding about the self-concealment and life satisfaction relationship is consistent with the inhibition model (Kelly, 2002). Self-concealers may not develop and maintain secure relationship with others. So their life satisfaction levels are negatively affected by self-concealment level. Adolescents who higher self-concealment level are likely to have lower positive emotions and higher negative emotions. This result suggests that self-concealment is a crucial predictor of adolescent life satisfaction. The present study revealed that the adverse effect of self-concealment on adolescent life satisfaction decreased due to the suppression effect of social awareness. Finally, according to the results of this study, it can be said that adolescents with lower social awareness and higher self-concealment tend to keep more negative personal secrets, therefore their life satisfaction levels decrease.

Using the self-concealment scores, which has negative relationships with life satisfaction, in the prediction nevertheless improved the overall prediction by effectively removing the measurement artifact variance from the social awareness scores, thereby it makes the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction purer. Thus, it makes more effective prediction for the adolescents' life satisfaction by self-concealment. That is, social awareness has a negative suppression effect in the self-concealment and adolescent life satisfaction relationship. This type of suppression effect occurs when a variable has a negative weight included in a regression equation (Lancaster, 1999). McNemar (1945) stated that a suppression variable increases prediction with a variable that has a negative correlation with the criterion (cited in Lancaster, 1999). Previous studies demonstrated that social awareness was related to the ability to manage the negative emotions (Greene & Kamimura, 2003), critical thinking skills (Tsui, 2000), quality of interpersonal relationships (Doğan, 2006), and social behaviors (Doctoroff et al., 2006). In the present study examining the suppression effect of the social awareness, these variables being associated with social awareness might considered as factors which they revealed the suppression effect of social awareness in the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction. Furthermore, variables being associated with social awareness (e.g. critical thinking skills, the ability to manage the negative emotions, establishing and maintaining relationships, and quality of interpersonal relationships) positively affect adolescents' life satisfaction. Thus, in the present study, the suppression effect of social awareness may be found in the self-concealment and adolescent life satisfaction relationship.

As known, more than one independent variable can be associated with the dependent variable in social sciences especially in psychology. For example, in the present study, when some variables (e.g. critical thinking skills, positive mood, the ability to manage the emotions, the skills of establishing and maintaining relationships, positive social behaviors, and social support) were included as independent variables in the regression equation, the validity of the overall model predicting life satisfaction could increase. As known, suppression effect is removed the measurement artifact variance from the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In this context, in the present research, removing the artifact variance of social awareness in the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction exposes the core effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction. Because when social awareness was removed from regression model, the effect of the variables associated with social awareness was removed from the model. Finally, when individuals' social awareness levels increase, their life satisfaction level may also increase even if they have higher self-concealment levels.

The predicting effect of self-concealment on life satisfaction may be decreased due to artifact effect of social awareness because individuals with higher self-concealment may have distorted perceptions about what others feel and think about themselves. According to Goleman (2006), social awareness is an indicator about being aware of what others feel and think. In this context, social awareness may decrease individuals' distorted perceptions about what others feel and think about themselves, and therefore the predictive power of self-concealment on life satisfaction may

decrease. In the present study, a significant and positive relationship between social awareness and self-concealment was found ( $r = .12$ ). This result demonstrated that individuals with self-concealment have social awareness to a certain level of, albeit low. This situation may imply that individuals with self-concealment are tend to disclose themselves particularly to people who they can trust because of their social awareness.

Furthermore, adolescents with higher self-concealment do not interact with peers, who engages in supportive behaviors, satisfying relationship, which can be a protective role of social isolation. Thus, self-concealment predicted life satisfaction negatively. Furthermore, social awareness suppressed the relationship between self-concealment and life satisfaction. Because it includes the information on social issues and being aware of what others feel and think.

The present study results are encouraging for continued investigation of how social awareness contributes to adolescents' life satisfaction and development. Social awareness may increase and strengthen happiness, adolescents' life satisfaction, and well-being, and it may also facilitate and encourage receive social support and using psychological service in adolescents. Furthermore, adolescent with higher social awareness receive more peer support, and have satisfying relationship than adolescent with higher self-concealment. So future studies relevant the adolescent life satisfaction and self-concealment should focus on social support, manage the negative emotions, intimate relationship, and critical thinking skills because these variables may be suppressor variables like social awareness in the relationship between life satisfaction and factors decreasing life satisfaction as self-concealment. With the results of this study, it can be suggested that psycho-education programs can be applied to increase social awareness for adolescences with higher self-concealment levels, and the results of these programs can be examined.

There are some limitations about the sample, measures, and method in the present study. First, since the sample of the study consisted of adolescent who range from 12 to 16 years, the results are limited in terms of the generalizability to other populations. Second, the data was gathered only self-report measures lack of other data, such as peer and family assessment, and behavioral data. Third, due to the fact that the cross-sectional study was conducted, and relational survey model from quantitative research methods were used in the present study, the findings did not allow us to draw strong causal relationships among variables. Thus, the data which gathering in the future studies on adolescent life satisfaction, social awareness, and self-concealment should be collected from other populations for the generalizability of the findings, and they should be gathered using several measurement tools and/or other data such as peer and family assessment and behavioral data.

## 5. Conclusions

However, although the limitations mentioned above, the present study will provide an important contribution to the literature in terms of identifying the variables that affect adolescent life satisfaction. Self-concealment and social awareness were found to be playing a critical role in the prediction of life satisfaction. In addition, the buffer impact of the social awareness on adolescent life satisfaction was explored in the present study. Furthermore, the present study may contribute to the design of new research about life satisfaction and happiness.

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