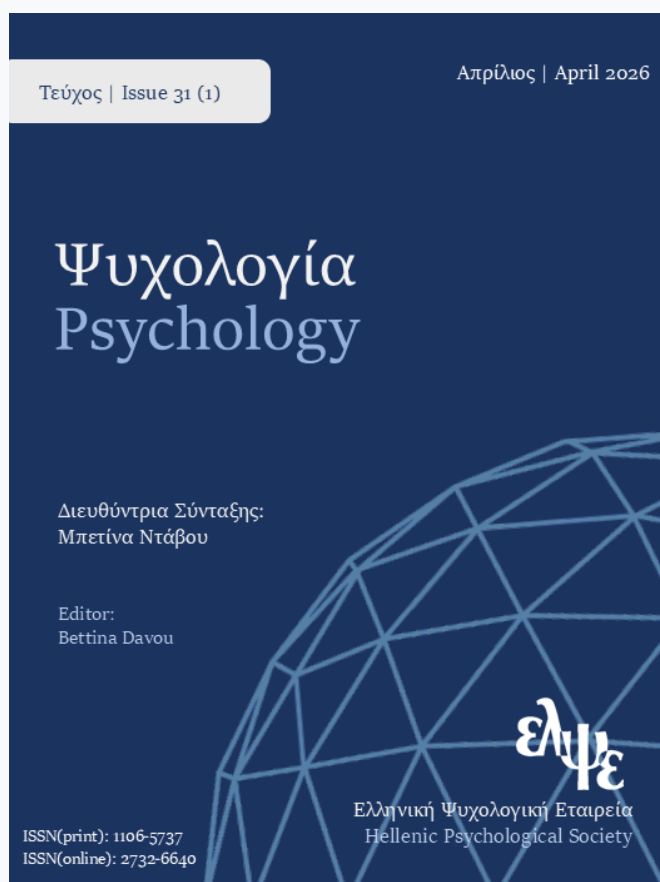


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ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

The role of personal therapy on university adaptation, psychological resilience and life satisfaction

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KEYWORDS

Personal therapy
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 University adaptation
 Life satisfaction
 Mediation
 Moderation

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ABSTRACT

The transition to university presents several challenges for emerging adults, with the literature revealing an association between university adaptation, life satisfaction and psychological resilience. Moreover, there is a growing interest in investigating the effect of personal therapy on overall student experience. The current study explored the role of personal therapy on the association between university adaptation, psychological resilience and life satisfaction. The sample consisted of 224 Greek-speaking students, 99 men (44.2%) and 125 women (55.4%), with a mean age of 21.61 years ($SD = 2.95$). Participants completed the College Adaptation Questionnaire, the Resilience Evaluation Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Results revealed that participants had statistically significant differences in university adaptation, ($z = -5.18, p < .001$), psychological resilience ($z = -5.14, p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($z = -3.76, p < .001$), with students who engaged in personal therapy scoring higher. Additionally, strong positive correlations were found between the three main variables (from $r_{ho} = .56$ to $r_{ho} = .69, p < .001$). Finally, mediation and moderation analysis revealed that psychological resilience partially mediated the relationship between university adaptation and life satisfaction, while university adaptation was found to be a stronger predictor of life satisfaction for students who engaged in personal therapy over students without therapy resulting in psychological therapy being a significant moderator of this association. Results point out the significant role of personal therapy, whereas its interpretation from the frame of counselling and positive psychology can provide clinical implications for improving the quality of university experience.

The transition to university is a crucial period for emerging adults, with some students adapting well to the new challenges while others struggle with emerging academic, personal and social challenges during that period (Bailey & Phillips, 2016; Fernández et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2015). The main difficulties during the university transition are psychosocial, hindering students' adaptation and ultimately life satisfaction (Mahmoud et al., 2012; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2011). According to the literature, psychological resilience is an important factor which can positively impact university adaptation and life satisfaction (Brewer et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2017). Additionally, numerous promising research findings indicate that personal development can be facilitated by personal therapy which can be considered as an effective mean of growth for university students (e.g., McAleavey et al., 2019; Vescovelli et al., 2017). While the literature looking at the possible links between personal development and student well-being is growing (Haktanir et al., 2021; Nafziger et al. 1999; Trevisan et al., 2017), the exploration of the role of personal therapy on students' academic life, in conjunction with other factors, is often left outside the research scope. Thus, the focus of the current study is to

investigate the role of personal therapy on students' adaptation to university, psychological resilience and life satisfaction.

Challenges and difficulties in university adaptation and life satisfaction

Most individuals, begin their university education around the same time they leave their family home, still financially dependent on their parents while striving to earn their psychological autonomy. This phase demands the transition into a student-role, by investing in higher-level studies, actively participating in social life and accomplishing several developmental tasks to form their individuality. In addition, the university experience coincides with a developmentally high risk period which could facilitate the incubation of serious mental health problems (Auerbach et al., 2016; Brufraerts et al., 2019; Drapeau et al., 2012), especially for students who cannot fully overcome the aforementioned challenges and achieve the necessary personal growth.

As a result of being unable to overcome transitional challenges, mental health disorders become quite common among university students. More specifically, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse and loneliness, are some of the mostly cited mental health problems in the relevant literature (Eisenberg et al., 2011; Fruehwirth et al., 2023; Levine et al., 2023). The association between transitional difficulties and mental health problems in university students, resonates with three alerting facts: a) a significant proportion of students have untreated pre and post matriculation onset of disorders (Auerbach et al., 2016), b) the prevalence of mental health disorders is consistently increasing (Knapstad et al., 2021; Lipson et al., 2019) and c) the prevalence rate of mental health difficulties, especially anxiety and depression, is higher in the university population than in the general population (Auerbach et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2021; Shiels et al., 2008). Thus, it can be postulated that not only transitional challenges, but also mental health difficulties can become a major risk factor for students' overall university adaptation which may also hinder their satisfaction with life.

Adaptation refers to a dynamic process between an individual and an environment, where the individual makes all the necessary efforts to meet the new environment's demands by overcoming the inconsistencies and imbalances created during this interaction (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Hence, it can be said that adaptation to university is the level of adjustment to the educational process and the ability to respond to the demands of the university (academic, social, emotional and other). As already mentioned, mental health and other personal difficulties developed during the transition to university, and even throughout the overall experience, have been found to negatively affect the levels of university adaptation. Moreover, academic overload, lower quality of interpersonal relationships, absence of a strong supportive network as well as financial strains among many other factors could considerably challenge students' adaptation (Choi et al., 2016; Kamel, 2018; Maunder, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). According to a recent systematic review, the main consequences of not being able to adapt to the university environment are, drop-out from courses, poor academic performance, low commitment, and bad mental as well as physical health (Sahao & Kienen, 2021). From the above, it can be understood that being unable to adapt and respond to the demands of the university may result into further serious academic, personal and social problems, as well as university drop-out and ultimately in a sense of dissatisfaction with life.

One element stemming from the positive psychology literature, which is increasingly explored in conjunction with university adaptation, is subjective well-being. Subjective well-being, is a person's general evaluation of their happiness which according to Diener (1984), consists of three major components, (i) positive affect, (ii) negative affect and (iii) life satisfaction (LS). From these concepts, we chose to focus on LS as it is a highly valued parameter in higher education (HE) due to its positive association with overall academic experience and psychological well-being (Akanni & Oduaran, 2018; Esteban et al., 2022). Although researchers may define LS in slightly different terms, there is an agreement in perceiving LS as a cognitive evaluation of one's quality of general life, or specific life-domains, according to the standards which the person establishes (Pavot & Diener, 2008). Studies directly examining the relationship between university adaptation and LS are quite limited, with more

studies either indirectly examining LS or focusing on the association between adaptation and subjective well-being. Nevertheless, existing literature shows a significant positive link between the two. More specifically, Bailey and Philips (2016), among other findings, reported a significant moderate positive correlation between university adaptation and LS. In addition, Smojver-Ažić et al. (2010) found a strong positive correlation between academic adjustment and LS and similarly Akanni and Oduaran (2018) found that not only academic adjustment strongly correlated with LS but it also mediated the relationship between social support and LS. Finally, a study with very small number of participants, found that academic adjustment problems significantly and negatively correlated with LS, yet different results were extracted for students living with their parents compared to those living alone (Phogat & Rajina, 2020).

It must be noted at this point, that all relevant previous studies have mainly focused on freshmen students, overlooking in this way possible inferences on the association between adaptation and LS for overall university experience. On the one hand, it is understandable that investigating this topic in freshers is of outmost importance, since most studies show that the transition to university and the associated changes during the initial enrolment may cause severe distress which can seriously impact their adaptation. On the other hand, not many studies have explored if adaptation issues may also appear to other years of study too. Furthermore, although significant moderate to strong correlations were reported between university adaptation and LS, perhaps a more holistic investigation with the addition of other variables could further explain this association and help us understand how adaptation challenges could be tackled and how students' overall LS could be improved. One such variable with a protective function, is another concept derived from the literature of positive psychology, psychological resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

The effect of psychological resilience

Resilience, is a multifaced concept and a subject of interest to several disciplines, which gathers a number of debates around its nature and even its conceptualization (Luthar et al., 2000; Skodol, 2010). Generally, resilience can be understood as a responsive ability in the face of a threatening event or a stressor, where the individual bounces back from adversities and ultimately adapts to challenging experiences (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013; Masten & Wright, 2010). From a psychological perspective, resilience is better understood as the person's appraisal of their ability to cope during stress (self-efficacy) and the trust in themselves of actually being resilient (self-confidence) (van der Meer et al., 2018). The strength to overcome transitional or adaptation challenges during the university experience by maintaining equilibrium and mental health, rightly places psychological resilience among those vital protective factors in the field of HE.

The literature on the value of psychological resilience in HE, reveals positive attributions on variables such as adaptation, mental health, well-being and LS. For example, the study of Khan et al. (2019) revealed that psychological resilience, among other protective factors, was found to significantly predict positive adjustment of first-year college students from a large university in the northeastern US. Similarly, Haktanir et al. (2018) found that first-year university students enrolled at a university in the southern US who reported greater resilience, also had higher adjustment to university. In a recent larger-scale research involving 28 Chinese universities, a strong positive correlation was found between psychological resilience and college adjustment among freshers (Gao et al., 2024). Moreover, other studies showed that resilience was a significant predictor of university students' subjective well-being and mental health before (Chen, 2016; Turner et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2020) and during the Covid-19 pandemic (Liu et al., 2021). Concerning the association between resilience and LS, the study of Khalid (2021) reported a significant positive effect of psychological resilience on LS, and also in the study of Tepeli Temiz and Tari Cömert (2018) it was revealed that university students who had higher levels of psychological resilience had increased LS compared to those with lower resilience scores. Furthermore, a bulk of studies which explored more complex associations between resilience, LS and other variables, indicate that

psychological resilience acts as a mediator between attachment styles and LS (Parpottas et al., 2024; Özbay & Çelik, 2024), between emotional intelligence and LS (Kartol et al., 2024) and between academic self-efficacy and LS (Mao et al., 2022). Lastly, in the study of Guo (2017) psychological resilience was found to be both a mediator and a moderator in the relationship between social support and LS. From the aforementioned literature, it can be understood that psychological resilience has a significant effect on students' general experience in HE and could potentially be a protective factor for their mental health and well-being. At this point, we turn our attention back to the conceptualization of psychological resilience, as is deemed important for unfolding our study's hypotheses. The possible distinction between theories conceptualizing resilience as a personality trait, a process or an outcome, can help us understand what could possibly define the ability to maintain normal levels of functioning during a stressful event/period (e.g., adaptation to university).

According to the theoretical conceptualizations of resilience as a trait, it is suggested that a number of personality characteristics allow a person to deal with difficulties and adapt to a situation even before encountering an adversity. One way to look such traits, is to refer to Block and Block's theory (1980) on "ego-resilience" which consists of traits such as strength of character, resourcefulness, flexibility of functioning in response to environmental-contextual changes, optimism, and the ability to detach and conceptualize problems. In addition, researchers have associated psychological resilience with characteristics such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, competence to overcome adversities, dispositional optimism and conscientiousness (Choi et al., 2019; van der Meer, et al., 2018). All these characteristics, are assumed to be pre-existing and increase an individual's capacity for being resilient. A different direction is taken when resilience is perceived as a process. Under this notion, resilience is understood as a dynamic process which unfolds during and after adversities, with the individual's ability to adapt being situational (Luthar et al., 2000). The individual may use a range of strategies to cope with struggles and challenges, and hence the capacity to deal with adversities will develop through time and concurrently through interaction with several contextual, relational and personal factors. Nevertheless, under this notion it is understood that sometimes the individual will positively react during an adversity, while at other times may react differently. Finally, there are those who conceptualize resilience as an outcome and more specifically, as the outcome of an increased self-efficacy, well-being, mental health and adaptability which derives from previous exposure in adversities (Hephsebha & Deb, 2024). According to this notion, resilience is better understood not only as the result of previous experience which can be used to build up resilience levels, but also as the individual's positive expectations of their ability to overcome difficulties.

Notwithstanding the different theoretical approaches of conceptualizing resilience, one may rightfully hypothesize that resilience can be better understood in integration. Under this view, the interactive influence of personal characteristics with psychological factors and contextual processes, could result in specific appraisals of an individual's resources to deal with, and overcome, adversities. Moreover, regardless to the developmental nature of resilience and possible notions such as "either being a matter of existence or absence", or "being a static trait or a process" (Masten & Wright, 2010), we would like to focus on how resilience could be facilitated as dynamic process during the university experience to help students thrive and overcome adaptation difficulties. One meaningful way to promote psychological resilience, is by focusing on personal growth and development achieved through personal therapy (Bartholomew et al., 2020).

Personal therapy and academic life

From what we have seen so far, the literature indicates that young adults who attend university may face serious challenges to their well-being and while the prevalence of mental health problems in HE is rising and many students report mental health concerns, they do not seek support (Auerbach et al., 2018; Czyz et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2021). However, nowadays there is a variety of student mental health services (e.g., on and off campus centers, psychiatric or psychological services) and research reveals that the greater the availability of such

support the higher the use (Osborn et al., 2022). Specifically, for the use of psychological services, research efforts report the effectiveness of personal therapy on students' mental health, academic performance and overall well-being (for a systematic review see Cerolini et al., 2023). For example, McLeavy et al. (2017) found that routine psychotherapy offered in campus counselling centers significantly reduced symptoms. Similarly, Vescovelli et al. (2017) reported that students who received psychotherapy in a university counselling center, significantly improved their well-being and also reduction in distress was observed, regardless of the psychotherapy type they received. Additionally, the study of Nash et al. (2017), found that students who needed counselling but did not use such services had poorer academic outcomes and campus satisfaction, whereas students who used it at least once were more academically engaged than those who were in need but did not receive help. Finally, there is also evidence that personal therapy (face-to-face and online) did not only have positive effects on university students' reduction of symptomatology but also in increasing their LS (Crugnola et al., 2020; Ierardi et al., 2022; Zeren et al., 2020). Although these studies show that personal therapy can positively affect academic life, overall mental health and well-being, some indirect inferences could be also drawn on its effects on academic adaptation.

Surprisingly, although the existing literature leaves us with a general impression that one of the main resources in overcoming university adaptation challenges, could be psychological support, there is only a scant number of studies directly exploring the impact of personal therapy on students' adaptation to university, with great differences in methodological design, in sample sizes but also in capturing the format, duration and theoretical model of therapy. For example, two decades ago, DeStefano et al. (2001) found that students who pursued help for adjustment and psychological problems, initially had lower adaptation scores but after 6 weeks of counselling did not significantly differ from students who did not receive support, indicating that counselling could have improved their adaptation scores. It is worth to mention that in this study, the provided counselling was described as a brief problem-management approach and although initially 80 students consisted the counselling group and 90 the control group, only 51 participants from the counselling group and 85 of the control group completed the post-test measures. Social adaptation to college, among many other variables, was found to be significantly increased by group psychotherapy in a more recent study which used a pre-test-post-test design (Mejías et al., 2019). Nevertheless, results from this study should be cautiously interpreted since it took place only in one university in Mexico, with a very small sample of participants ($n = 41$) who were diagnosed of depression, anxiety or mild personality disorders and finally 35 out 41 participants had already been in psychotherapy at some point in their life prior to their participation in the study. Another study which investigated the effects of a specific psychological intervention among first-year medical students using a randomized control trial (50 students were signed in the intervention group and 50 in the control group), found that a 2-hour weekly well-being therapy provided for five consecutive weeks, significantly improved university adaptation, among other factors, from pre-test to post-test (five weeks) and follow up (three months) phases (Xu et al., 2019). This study also had important limitations, such as a small sample size which consisted only by medical students, important attrition rates (11 participants from the intervention group did not complete the intervention and three participants from the control group dropped out) and lastly the study's outcomes were evaluated only by using the participants' reports on psychological well-being. Finally, Alshammari (2020) found that students who received a 12-session group counselling taking place twice-weekly had improved adaptation levels, compared to those who have not received any intervention. However, this study's results must be very cautiously interpreted for to many reasons such as: small sample size ($n = 60$), that participants came from one university in Saudi Arabia, the sample characteristics were unclear, participants were assessed prior to being assigned in the study-groups with all of them having high stress scores, the study's procedure and design were not explained in detail (e.g., how participants were assigned in the experimental and control groups and at which point after the intervention adaptation was measured) and finally important preliminary statistics such as normality and reliability analysis were not reported.

Generally, from these four studies, it can be only tentatively hypothesised that personal therapy could presumably positively contribute in students' adaptation to university and more studies are needed to draw conclusive evidence. Under these conditions, and to strengthen our understanding of the effects of personal therapy on university adaptation and LS, we turn our attention to the possible effect of personal therapy on psychological resilience. As a matter of fact, a number of studies confirm that psychological resilience could be increased by psychotherapeutic methods offered on individual and group level, during short-term and long-term periods, and in clinical and non-clinical adult populations. Grouping these studies' results, a significant increase of resilience in university or college students is indicated by: (i) various stand-alone models of psychotherapy such as CBT (Steffen & Bartlett, 2022), Solution-Focused Brief Group Therapy (Hendar et al., 2019), Person-Centered, Psychodynamic Therapy, Family and Existential Therapy (Lakioti & Stalikas, 2020), (ii) integrating psychotherapy models such as well-being therapy with CBT (Fava & Tomba, 2009), CBT with positive psychology (Fava 2016) and DBT Group Therapy with Positive Psychotherapy (Uliaszek et al., 2016), as well as the Padesky and Mooney's (2012) Strengths-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy an approach which synthesised CBT with positive psychology to build and strengthen resilience (Victor et al., 2017), (iii) using interventions informed by psychotherapeutic models such as CBT (León Hernandez et al., 2024), DBT (Lee & Arora, 2023) and Positive Psychotherapy (Ghasemzadeh & Moharer, 2023) and finally (iv) using stand-alone interventions and programs such as mindfulness (Galante et al., 2021), biofeedback (Steffen & Bartlett, 2022), resilience intervention program (Akeman et al., 2020), Positive Psychotherapy-based Resilience program (Öner et al., 2024) and the Wellness and Resilience Course (Chugani et al., 2023).

Therefore, according to previous studies we could logically expect different levels of psychological resilience between university students according to if they attended personal therapy or not. As a result of this, different adaptation levels and appraisals of LS could also exist. Although studies have separately explored the associations between university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS, very few studies have attempted to investigate the impact of personal therapy on all variables. Additionally, to the best of our knowledge, no previous studies explored a more complex association between all four variables using a mediation or a moderation analysis, especially in Greek-speaking university students. Therefore, the aim of our study was dual, firstly to investigate possible differences in university adaptation and LS according to the existence of personal therapy and secondly to explore the role of personal therapy and psychological resilience on adaptation and LS in Greek-speaking university students.

Research aim and hypotheses

Based on the previous literature, the protective aspect of personal therapy and also the potential growth and development of psychological resilience, transfuse important clinical implications not only to tackle issues of university adaptation but also to help students have better appraisals of life during their academic endeavour. Therefore, our research hypotheses were the following:

- H1: Students who engaged in personal therapy will have higher scores in university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS, compared to students who have not engaged in personal therapy.
- H2: University adaptation and LS will be associated with psychological resilience.
- H3: The relationship between university adaptation and LS will be mediated by psychological resilience and moderated by personal therapy.

Method

Participants

The sociodemographics of the sample were collected with simple anonymous questions for gender, age, year of study, subject of study and the presence or absence of personal therapy. The sample consisted of 224 Greek-

speaking university students from Cyprus, 99 men (44.2%) and 125 women (55.4%) with a mean age of 21.61 ($SD = 2.95$). Table 1 presents all the demographic information, including frequencies and proportions.

Table 1. Demographic information

Categories	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Men	99 (44.2)
Women	125 (55.8)
Subject of study	
Medicine	17 (7.6)
Sciences	53 (23.7)
Social Sciences	117 (52.2)
Business	34 (15.2)
Other	3 (1.3)
Year of Study	
First	37 (16.5)
Second	49 (21.9)
Third	48 (21.4)
Fourth	77 (34.4)
Fifth	8 (3.6)
Sixth +	5 (2.2)
Therapy	
Yes	124 (55.4)
No	100 (44.6)

Measures

College Adaptation Questionnaire (CAQ; Crombag, 1968; Adaptation in Greek: Gkantona & Stogiannidou, 2002). CAQ is used to assess student adaptation and consists of 18 items which provide a total score of general adaptation to university. Participants can answer the questionnaire on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (it doesn't apply to me at all) to 7 (it applies to me very much), with higher scores indicating greater adaptability to university. The questionnaire's internal consistency was found to be very good with Cronbach's alpha = .89 for both the original and the translated version (Gkantona et al., 2006; Van Rooijen, 1986). Finally, the Greek version has a good construct validity as confirmed by its high correlation ($r = .73$) with the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Gkantona et al., 2006).

Resilience Evaluation Scale (RES; van der Meer et al., 2018; Adaptation in Greek: Kolaitis et al., 2021). RES is used to measure psychological resilience to adult population. It consists of nine items answered in a Likert scale from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) with stronger psychological resilience being indicated by higher scores. RES also provides scores for two subscales Self-confidence and Self-efficacy. This scale was chosen among several other, due to its excellent psychometric properties and its ease of use. The English RES reports high internal consistency with $a = .89$ for its total score (Self-confidence $a = .89$ and Self-efficacy $a = .87$) and also the Greek scale presented with a high internal consistency of $a = .91$ in a student sample (Parpottas et al., 2024). Finally, it was found that the English version of the RES had a very good convergent validity with scales such as Resilience (RS) $r_s = .74$, Self-efficacy (GSE) $r_s = .73$, Self-esteem (RSES) $r_s = .71$, Global Functioning (GF) $r_s = .55$ and PTSD symptoms (PCL-5) $r_s = -.39$.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). SWLS consists of five statements, answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree – 7 = Strongly agree) assessing the degree of satisfaction to life. Higher scores indicate higher subjective reports of LS at the given time of measurement. SWLS was found to have a good internal consistency with Cronbach $\alpha = .87$, as well as good convergent validity with scales measuring well-being with $r = .50$ to $r = .75$ (Diener et al., 1985). The Greek translation of the scale presents with a Cronbach $\alpha = .84$ and a good concurrent validity of $r = .77$ with the Life Satisfaction Index-LSI (Galanakis et al., 2017).

Procedure

In compliance with the Helsinki Declaration, the study was initially submitted to the Cyprus National Bioethics Committee and following approval (EEBK ΕΠ 2022.01.292) participants were recruited through social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). Potential participants were directed to Google Forms via an electronic link. Before completing the survey, comprehensive information about the study was available to all participants and those who agreed to participate voluntarily provided their consent. After the study's completion, data were downloaded, coded on an SPSS file and secured on a password-protected pc which was accessible only to researchers whilst the research platform was deleted.

Statistical analysis

IBM SPSS version 29, was used to statistically analyze our data. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, as well as the use of histograms, Q–Q plots, and skewness και kurtosis, were employed to check data normality prior to testing our hypotheses. Results indicated that data were not normally distributed, with p -values being $< .001$. Moreover, the scale's internal consistency was tested with Cronbach alpha and preliminary analyses were ran for the descriptives. Finally, to test our main hypotheses, we used non-parametric tests such as Mann-Whitney U Test and Spearman rho, whereas to test mediation and moderation analyses we used the PROCESS plugin, following the necessary procedure (Hayes, 2013).

Results

Reliability Analysis

Results indicate that all the scales used in the survey show a fairly high level of reliability. Specifically, "University Adaptation" had a reliability of $\alpha = .884$, "Resilience" had a reliability of $\alpha = .919$ and "Life Satisfaction" had a reliability of $\alpha = .898$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. Internal consistency of College Adaptation Questionnaire (CAQ), Resilience Evaluation Scale (RES) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
CAQ	18	.88
RES	9	.92
SWLS	5	.90

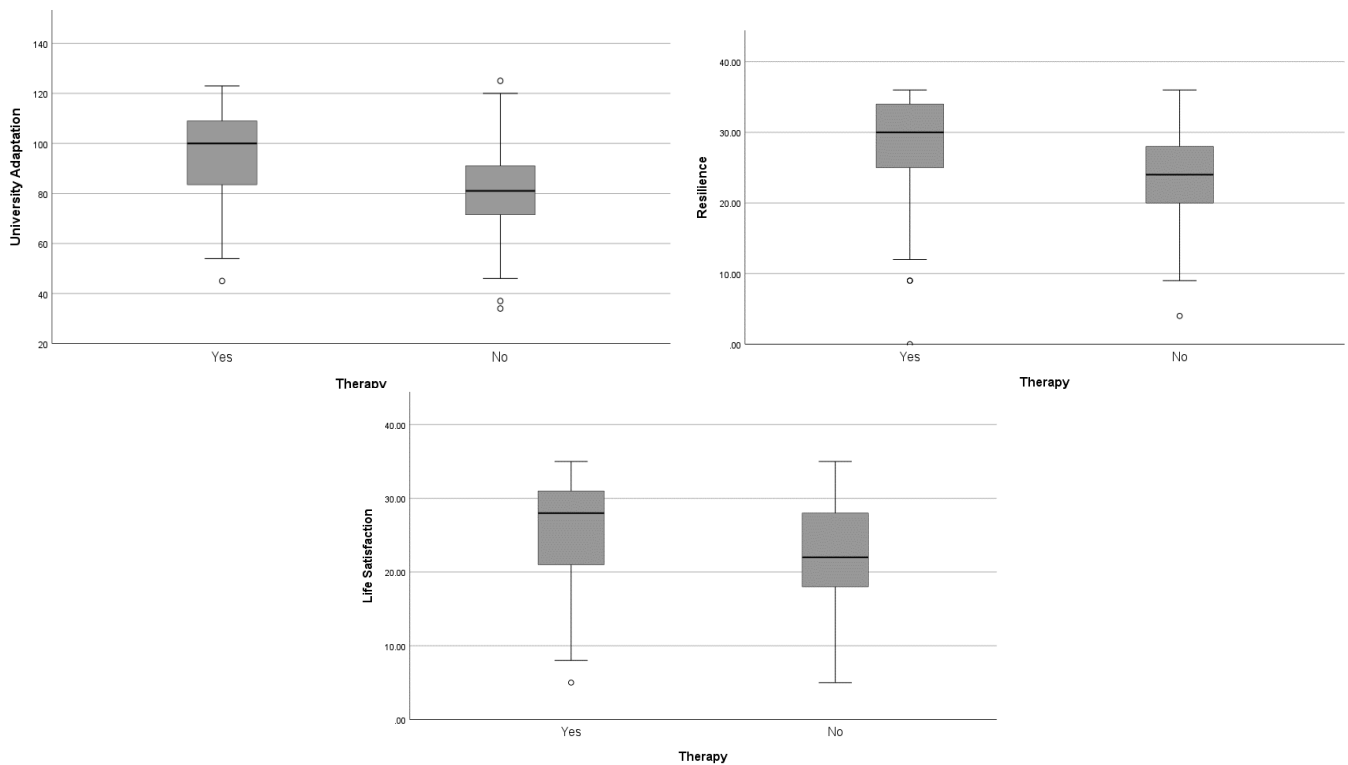
Main analysis

Differences in adaptation, resilience and LS between students who received and students who did not receive treatment. The Mann-Whitney test was used for this purpose, with analysis showing differences in university adaptation ($z = -5.18, p < .001$), resilience ($z = -5.14, p < .001$) and LS ($z = -3.76, p < .001$), with higher scores occurring in students who received personal therapy (see Table 3 and Figures 1-3).

Table 3. Differences in adaptation to university, resilience and life satisfaction according to therapy existence

	Therapy (n = 124)		No Therapy (n = 100)		P value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
University Adaptation	94.98	16.80	82.56	17.33	< .001
Resilience	28.41	6.96	24.04	6.65	< .001
Life satisfaction	25.81	7.08	22.56	6.67	< .001

Figures 1-3. Box plots showing the outcome from Mann-Whitney U for comparison between groups



Correlation between student university adaptation, resilience and LS. The analysis carried out aimed to highlight the correlations between the dependent variables of the survey. Table 4 shows statistically significant and strong correlations between the variables, ranging from $\rho = .56$ to $\rho = .69$, ($p < .001$).

Table 4. Correlation analysis between university adaptation, resilience and life satisfaction

	University Adaptation	Resilience	Life Satisfaction
University Adaptation	-	.56*	.67*
Resilience		-	.69*
Life Satisfaction			-

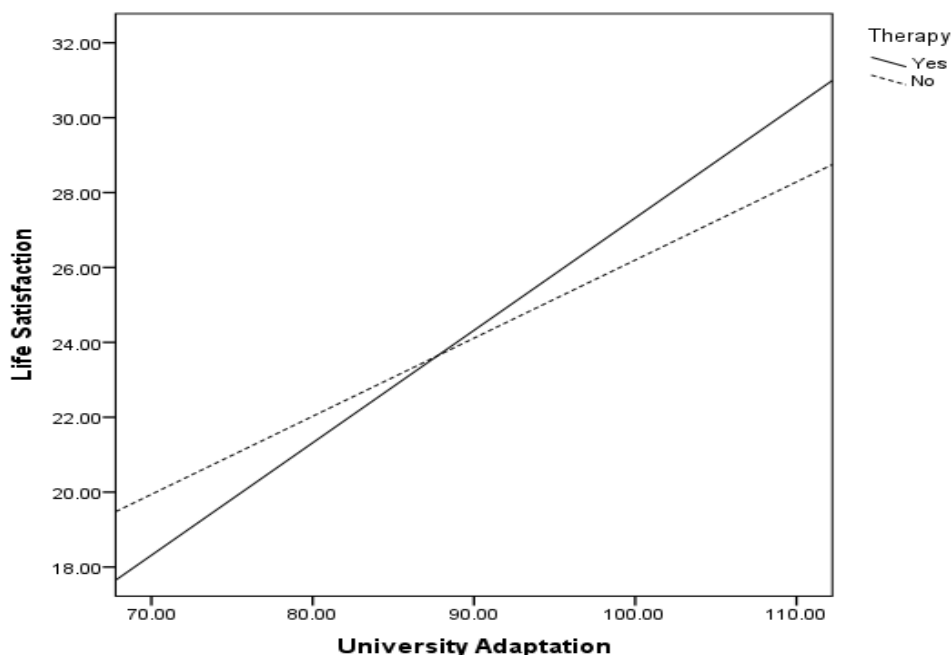
* $p < .001$

Mediation and Moderation Analysis.

Moderation. To test the hypothesis that LS is a function of multiple factors, and more specifically whether Therapy moderates the relationship between University Adaptation and LS, we used Haye’s Macro plugin for SPSS which gave an overall model $F(3,220) = 59.72$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .45$ with a coefficient for University Adaptation $b = 0.39$, $t(220) = 6.08$, $p < .001$, a coefficient for Therapy $b = 8.05$, $t(220) = 2.14$, $p = .034$ and an interaction

coefficient $b = -0.09$, $t(220) = -2.19$, $p = .029$ with conditional coefficients for students in therapy $b = 0.30$, $t(220) = 10.58$, $p < .001$ and students not in therapy $b = 0.21$, $t(220) = 6.80$, $p < .001$.

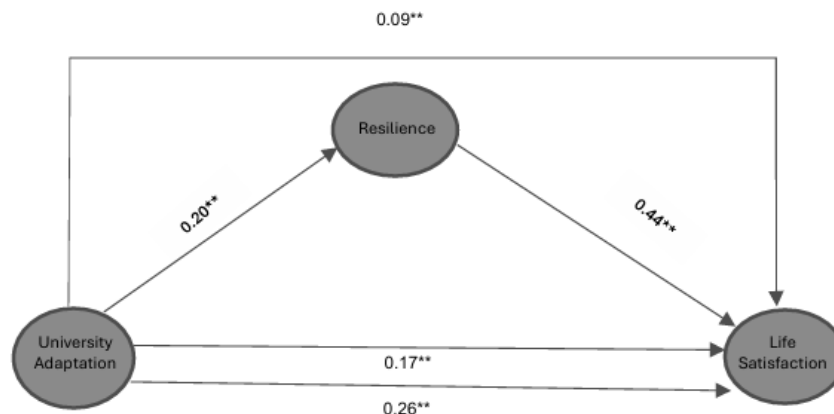
Figure 4. The moderating role of personal therapy on the relationship between university adaptation and LS



Mediation. For mediation, as shown in table 5, the results indicated that there was a significant total effect of $R^2 = .27$ between University Adaptation and LS ($B = 2.26$, $p < .001$), through the indirect path University Adaptation to Resilience to LS ($B = 0.09$, $p < .001$) with part (a) University Adaptation on Resilience Total ($B = 0.20$, $p < .001$) and part (b) Resilience Total on LS ($B = 0.44$, $p < .001$) being both significant, and the direct effect University Adaptation to LS ($B = 0.17$, $p < .001$). In addition, the Sobel test for the indirect effect is $z = 6.30$, $p < .001$. The mediation analysis is depicted in Figure 5.

Table 5. Mediation analysis

Predictor	b	95%CIs	z	Sig	F (df)	R ²	Sig
Model 1							
University Adaptation	0.20	[.159 - .248]	8.96	$p < .001$	80.2(1, 222)	.27	$p < .001$
Model 2							
Resilience	0.44	[.344 - .542]	8.84	$p < .001$			
University Adaptation	0.17	[.129 - .207]	8.50	$p < .001$	155.0(2,221)	.58	$p < .001$
Total Effect							
Total	0.26	[.220 - .297]	13.12	$p < .001$	172.15(1,222)	.44	$p < .001$
Indirect Effect							
University Adaptation	0.09	[.052 - .134]	6.30	$p < .001$			

Figure 5. *Mediation path*

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate possible differences in university adaptation and LS given the existence of personal therapy, examine the relationships between university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS but also to explore the role of personal therapy and psychological resilience on the relationship between adaptation and LS. Results confirmed the first two hypotheses and partly confirmed the third hypothesis.

Differences in university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS according to the existence of personal therapy

The first hypothesis of this study, that university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS would differ between students who received personal therapy and those who did not, was confirmed. Results indicate that, compared to students with no experience of personal therapy, students who engaged in personal therapy have higher levels of adaptation to the university, greater psychological resilience and higher appraisals of LS. These results, are in accordance with previous studies which found that personal therapy could help students adapt to the university (Alshammari, 2020; DeStefano et al., 2001; Mejías et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019), increase their perceptions of satisfaction with life (Crugnola et al., 2020; Ierardi et al., 2022; Zeren et al., 2020) and also help them develop higher resilience levels (Bartholomew et al., 2020). Although our results were expected, it is important to stress that personal therapy may actually play a crucial role in aiding students build the necessary skills to overcome difficulties, and thus to better adjust to the challenging environment of the university, and at the same time experience a better quality of life, compared to not utilising any support recourses. However, because our study captured personal therapy in terms of individual psychotherapy, comparisons to previous studies, and especially studies which captured personal therapy in other forms (e.g., counselling, group therapy, psychoeducational interventions etc.), should be cautiously made. Additionally, our results should be critically approached in light of pre-existing adaptational and resilience skills and already positive apprehensions of life in students who received therapy. In other words, it is possible that students in the therapy group were already equipped with those skills before engaging in the psychotherapeutic process and perhaps therapy enhanced its recognition and adaptive application, rather than developed those skills.

Associations between university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS

Our second hypothesis, that university adaptation, psychological resilience and LS would be associated, was also confirmed. Consistent with previous studies, we found a strong positive correlation between the three variables

(Akanni & Oduaran, 2018; Bailey & Philips, 2016; Gao et al., 2024; Haktanir et al., 2018; Khalid, 2021; Khan et al., 2019; Smojver-Ažić et al., 2010; Tepeli Temiz & Tari Cömert, 2018). Our results indicate that university students who report higher levels of university adaptation, tend to report higher levels of psychological resilience and LS. Trusting one's self of being able to respond well to adversities and at the same time being positive of their capabilities to adaptively cope with stressful situations, seems to relate to better university adaptation and higher satisfaction with life.

The mediation role of psychological resilience and the moderation effect of personal therapy on the relationship between university adaptation and LS

Our last hypothesis was also confirmed, with our findings suggesting that psychological resilience was a significant partial mediator in the relationship between university adaptation and LS, while personal therapy significantly moderated this relationship. From the results, it can be understood that students who reported higher levels of university adaptation showed higher appraisals of LS and this could be partly explained because of higher levels of psychological resilience. Furthermore, our results indicate that university adaptation was a stronger predictor of life satisfaction for students who engaged in personal therapy over students without therapy, resulting in psychological therapy being a significant moderator of this association.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the associations between these variables using mediation and moderation analyses. It can be postulated that our results not only confirm theoretical assumptions, but also studies which explored simple associations between these variables. For instance, from the studies that found a positive association between adaptation to university and LS (Akanni & Oduaran, 2018; Bailey & Philips, 2016; Smojver-Ažić et al., 2010), it is suggested that being interested in the chosen subject of study, while pursuing related personal goals, is an important indication of academic adjustment which provides a positive overview of life satisfaction. In addition, being curious to explore the new endeavours in HE and being actively involved in social life at university (e.g., involvement in social activities, exploring and building new relationships, etc.), shows a better adjustment which can make a student feel emotionally and personally content but also generally satisfied, highlighting a better sense of meaning in life. Similarly, studies that found a positive effect of psychological resilience on university adaptation but also on LS (Gao et al., 2024; Haktanir et al., 2018; Khalid, 2021; Khan et al., 2019; Tepeli Temiz & Tari Cömert, 2018), suggest that resilience has an important influence in healthy adjustment and also in overall satisfaction to life. Therefore, the mediating effect in our results, shows that university adaptation not only directly influences LS, but also (partially) indirectly influences it through psychological resilience. This postulates that our results expand on previous studies and provide a rationale to their findings. More specifically, psychological resilience as perceived by its two dimensions self-efficacy and self-confidence (van der Meer et al., 2018), highlights the importance of developing a trusting stance towards self in being capable to respond to difficulties and at the same time being positive in finding ways out of the difficulties, leading this way in achieving the so-called "earned adjustment". Thus, students who hold positive views of themselves and trust their capabilities to manage and overcome challenges such as, (i) the transition to a new environment, (ii) the academic difficulties which might arise in the course of their study and (iii) surely the emotional weights created by such challenges or in their social interactions and even from their own predisposing psychological stressors, may hold higher chances to be well adapted in university. Ultimately, being able to have healthy levels of university adaptation may also lead to a more positive perspective of being satisfied with life, partially achieved through psychological resilience, supporting in this way the protective and thriving aspect of psychological resilience.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that in our study, psychological resilience was a partial mediator, implying that either it could not fully explain the relationship between university adaptation and LS in our sample, or that generally other variables could also account as mediators in the aforementioned association, such as attachment

styles (Tepeli Temiz & Tari Cömert, 2018), social support (Akanni & Oduaran, 2018) and emotional intelligence (Xu & Choi, 2023). Furthermore, we must keep in mind other possible factors that may have influenced our study's variables such as students' physical health, emotional regulation and psychological flexibility but also social factors such as their socioeconomic status, perceived social support and finally the sense of belonging and connectedness with peers.

Another finding of our study, was that personal therapy moderated the association between university adaptation and LS, which indicates that adaptation to university has a stronger effect on LS for students with experience of personal therapy over students with no similar experience. Although adaptation and LS seem to have a positive linear relationship for both students with and without therapy, this association is significantly stronger for students in personal therapy. From the interaction effect, we understand that at low levels of university adaptation students without therapy present with higher LS, but at higher levels of university adaptation students in therapy have higher LS. Thus, according to our finding, there is no longer any unique effect of university adaptation on LS, because it depends upon the existence of personal therapy. To the best of our knowledge, this might be the first study to address for whom university adaptation most strongly predicts LS, and this is for students in personal therapy. Our results extend previous research, by indicating that students who utilize support resources such as personal therapy, can have a better university adaptation and be more satisfied with their lives (Alshammari, 2020; Cerolini et al., 2023; DeStefano et al., 2001; Mejías et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019). University students, face many challenges during their experience in HE which may be reflected in success-related anxieties but also in concerns about their self-image (confidence and esteem), their relationships and their future. Additionally, as we have seen in the literature, being in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood which coincides with the university experience, often poses several risks to mental health and overall well-being. Such risk factors can threaten not only their psychological and physical health, but also their adaptation to university which can lead to disappointing experiences in HE but also with dissatisfaction with their overall life. Hence, utilizing the necessary personal development resources can prevent the aforementioned negative results, especially if therapy tackles adaptational issues, exactly as stated in Nafziger et al. (1999) study on evaluating the outcomes of therapy provided to university students "... college adjustment is a holistic construct and that improvements in psychological and social functioning may have positive ripple effects in other areas ..." (p.9).

Personal therapy, as viewed from the perspective of counselling and positive psychology, aims in a deeper understanding of self by working through several personal conflicts and not merely focusing on pathology to reduce distress (Magyar-Moe et al., 2015; Milton, 2010; Pezirkianidis et al., 2023). Under this integrative approach, personal therapy has the potential to assist an individual to actively engage in the process of thriving which can lead to personal growth and ultimately promote overall well-being and LS (Kounenou et al., 2022; Kyvelou et al., 2023; Kyvelou & Tsitsas, 2023; Marrero et al., 2016; Min et al., 2022). Since the process of thriving was found to be associated to personal growth, well-being, LS and even psychological resilience (Brown et al., 2017; Flinchbaugh et al., 2015), and since personal therapy aims in achieving thriving and personal development, it is now evident in a number of studies that psychotherapy can promote resilience (Bartholomew et al., 2020). Therefore, our findings support previous studies and allow us to postulate not only that personal therapy may be useful in helping students better adapt to the university and be satisfied with their lives, but also that psychological resilience may be developed and enhanced by the psychotherapeutic process and ultimately positively affect such a relationship.

Conclusions

Albeit the significance of our results, the current study had several important limitations that must be acknowledged, but also to be used as the basis of recommendations for future research. Firstly, although we had specific exclusion criteria that did not allow participation of students: (i) from the clinical population, (ii) with an official diagnosis and (iii) being in any form of personal development other than individual psychotherapy, we cannot be sure if participants followed our instructions. Secondly, we omitted the collection of specific data which could have influenced our findings and make our results more comparable to previous studies. For example, we do not know exactly the duration of therapy (short or long term) or the psychotherapeutic model (cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, etc.) that was followed for students who reported being in personal therapy and we do not know if therapy was offered on or off campus. Similarly, we did not collect information about the reason(s) being in therapy, so we cannot exactly know if therapy was sought due to distress or as part of personal development and hence we cannot be definite of the effect of personal therapy on the development of adaptation, psychological resilience and LS especially if these skills pre-existed. Also, we do not know if students who reported being in therapy have ever had therapy again in the past and whether generally students who participated in our study have used any other support aids such as counselling, mentoring, academic accommodations during or before our study. In hindsight and especially looking at previous research which indicates that different psychotherapeutic models (and other personal development methods) offered on and off campus may have different effectiveness in building resilience levels and in helping students adapt to the university according to the students' presenting problem (Biasi et al., 2017; Cerolini et al., 2023; Monti et al., 2016), all these limitations are obvious and important aspects that could be included in the design of future studies.

Additionally, our sample was small and we also did not collect information to identify: (i) students with disabilities, (ii) those studying in part time or full-time basis and (iii) studying in distance or conventional mode. Since contemporary literature, is more interested to explore the impact of supportive means on the academic experience of students with disabilities but also of students enrolled in online courses (O'Shea et al., 2021; Parpottas et al., 2023; Wells, 2023), replication of this study by including such information is recommended for future research. Moreover, it is possible that a larger sample with better representations of students in each year-group, mode, level and subject of study, could have potentially minimized the limitations observed in our study and could have also allowed probable comparisons between the sample to help us better understand our results.

Another limitation, is that data were collected from Cyprus and cannot be generalized to all Greek-speaking university students not even to students from different cultures. The complexity of adjusting in a new academic and cultural setting, can create several challenges which can impact international students' overall experience and well-being. Although a number of relevant studies explore such effects (Bethel et al., 2020; Prasath et al., 2022), researchers especially in countries that attract international students are encouraged to explore concepts related to our study, due to the fact that more students nowadays travel abroad to study.

Moreover, perhaps if measurements were taken at different times rather than at one point, could have provided us a better indication of the impact of university adaptation, as well as psychological resilience, on LS. Additionally, possible biases or limitations in the interpretation of the positive effect of therapy on our main variables could have been minimized should we measured the pre and post scores of psychological resilience, adaptation and LS in the therapy group. Thus, the cross-sectional design of our study, may prevent us from drawing definite conclusions concerning causal relationships and future studies should aim for a longitudinal approach to overcome this.

Lastly, because our findings derived from online participation are being subject to possible limitations related to online surveys (e.g., difficulty in identifying and describing if participants were actually university students, higher chance of participation for those who had access to the internet and also interested in the topic,

etc.). Also, our findings derived from self-report questionnaires which are based on subjective perceptions. In the same line of argument, the utilization of specific questionnaires on university adaptation and resilience may not make our findings fully comparable to other studies. For example, although both the CAQ and RES had a good reliability in our study and were easy and fast to use, one would logically argue that the CAQ is one-dimensional compared to SAQS which measures adaptation in several dimensions (Baker & Siryk, 1999), and the RES is still a very new scale and more studies are needed for its establishment compared to the highly used CD-RISK (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Therefore, researchers may wish to include more diverse characteristics of the university student population, collect additional data on the specifics of personal therapy and use alternative research methodologies and designs to approach similar topics in future studies.

In the light of our study's findings, a number of practical implications could be suggested to inform the practice of professionals who work with university students. As past studies indicate that students face several challenges during their university experience which can affect their experience in HE (Auerbach et al., 2018; Sahao & Kienen, 2021), we believe that the facilitation of personal growth might be an important area to invest on. Our findings, show a positive link between psychological resilience, university adaptation and LS, but more importantly we found that the effect of university adaptation on LS was stronger for students who utilized personal therapy. Therefore, specific support mechanisms could be developed in the context of psychotherapeutic work to tackle risk factors and enhance university students' resilience which could ultimately contribute to successful adaptation and increase their LS.

An important implication is the promotion of personal therapy, offered on and off campus, as a resource which can be utilized to achieve a healthy adaptation to the university. Although a small number of studies have focused specifically on investigating the direct effect of personal therapy on university adaptation (Alshammari, 2020; DeStefano et al., 2001; Mejías et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019), it can be understood that personal therapy, has those elements which can be used for alleviating distress, for enhancing personal growth and even for working with issues directly or indirectly associated with adaptational struggles. Furthermore, based on our study's results, psychological resilience is one of the possible factors which can explain why students who adapt well at the university, also have higher levels of LS. According to previous studies, as a process which can lead to an individual's thriving, resilience can be developed and cultivated through personal therapy. At the same time, psychologists and psychotherapists who work with university students, could specifically design interventions to facilitate resilience. Therefore, as a result, we would expect that students with high resilience would be able to cope well with difficulties and adapt more successfully, something which could contribute in increasing satisfaction with their lives.

Lastly, we endorse the idea that universities should invest more vigorously in resources to support their students' well-being and mental health. Outdated approaches or cost-cutting services following the one-size-fits-all approach are strongly criticized. It is evident nowadays, more than before (generally speaking and not only as a lesson taken after the Covid-19 pandemic), that there is a drift towards the necessity for offering quality psychotherapeutic services in HE (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2024; Ladany, 2022; Times Higher Education, 2023). Hence, universities should focus on creating, or re-structuring, on-campus services such as counselling/psychological/psychotherapeutic centers, by staffing them with qualified and registered professionals and by expanding services to reflect interventions tailored to the actual needs of their students. Moreover, universities need to promote such services and make them visible to the wider student community, in order to ensure that students have the choice and access to personal therapy. Finally, the university administration could work together with faculty, academic advisors and the university psychotherapeutic service to develop better tools and information on how to assess students' needs and also how to effectively respond to students with the application of the necessary academic accommodations.

In conclusion, our study revealed that university adaptation had an important effect on university students' LS, and that this effect was partially mediated by psychological resilience and moderated by the existence of personal therapy. Our results highlight the importance of personal therapy in developing higher levels of psychological resilience which can act as a protective factor towards the challenges of adaptation in university and raising overall satisfaction with life. Thus, universities should invest in assessing their students' needs and understand how healthier adaptation could be achieved, by introducing students to a range of supportive resources to develop and strengthen psychological resilience from the early beginning of their studies. These resources, could be either offered on-campus through a university counselling service, or off-campus by other mental health professionals.

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Ο ρόλος της προσωπικής θεραπείας στην προσαρμογή στο πανεπιστήμιο, στην ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα και στην ικανοποίηση από τη ζωή

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ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Προσωπική θεραπεία Πανεπιστημιακή προσαρμογή Ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα Ικανοποίηση από τη ζωή Διαμεσολάβηση Ρύθμιση	<p>Η είσοδος στο πανεπιστήμιο επιφέρει διάφορες προκλήσεις για τους αναδυόμενους ενήλικες, με τη βιβλιογραφία να συνδέει την πανεπιστημιακή προσαρμογή με την ικανοποίηση από τη ζωή και την ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα. Παράλληλα, οι ερευνητές προσπαθούν να κατανοήσουν την επίδραση της προσωπικής θεραπείας στη γενικότερη φοιτητική εμπειρία. Σκοπός της παρούσας έρευνας ήταν η διερεύνηση του ρόλου της προσωπικής θεραπείας στη σχέση μεταξύ πανεπιστημιακής προσαρμογής, ψυχικής ανθεκτικότητας και ικανοποίησης από τη ζωή. Συμμετείχαν 224 ελληνόφωνοι φοιτητές/τριες, 99 εκ των οποίων ήταν άνδρες (44,2%) και 125 γυναίκες (55,4%), με μέσο όρο ηλικίας τα 21,61 έτη (SD= 2,95). Οι συμμετέχοντες συμπλήρωσαν το Ερωτηματολόγιο Προσαρμογής στο Πανεπιστήμιο, την Κλίμακα Αξιολόγησης Ανθεκτικότητας και την Κλίμακα Μέτρησης Ικανοποίησης από τη Ζωή. Μεταξύ των συμμετεχόντων, διαφάνηκαν στατιστικώς σημαντικές διαφορές στην προσαρμογή στο πανεπιστήμιο ($z = -5,18, p < 0,001$), στην ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα ($z = -5,14, p < 0,001$) και στην ικανοποίηση από τη ζωή ($z = -3,76, p < 0,001$), με υψηλότερα σκορ σε φοιτητές/τριες που είχαν λάβει προσωπική θεραπεία. Επιπροσθέτως, βρέθηκαν ισχυρές θετικές συσχετίσεις μεταξύ των κύριων μεταβλητών (από $rho = 0,56$ έως $rho = 0,69, p < 0,001$). Τέλος το μοντέλο διαμεσολάβησης έδειξε ότι η ψυχική ανθεκτικότητα διαμεσολαβεί μερικώς τη σχέση μεταξύ προσαρμογής στο πανεπιστήμιο και ικανοποίησης από τη ζωή, ενώ η προσαρμογή στο πανεπιστήμιο βρέθηκε να είναι ισχυρότερος προβλεπτικός παράγοντας της ικανοποίησης από τη ζωή για φοιτητές που είχαν λάβει προσωπική θεραπεία έναντι όσων δεν έλαβαν, καθιστώντας έτσι την προσωπική θεραπεία σημαντικό ρυθμιστή της σχέσης αυτής. Τα αποτελέσματα της παρούσας έρευνας, αναδεικνύουν τον σημαντικό ρόλο της προσωπικής θεραπείας, ενώ η ερμηνεία τους υπό τη σκοπιά της Συμβουλευτικής και Θετικής Ψυχολογίας μπορεί να παρέχει πρακτικές εφαρμογές για τη βελτίωση της ποιότητας της πανεπιστημιακής εμπειρίας.</p>
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