

**The Interaction of Goal Importance and Goal Attainment on the Well-Being of Eastern European Migrants in the United Kingdom.**

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### Abstract

Goal attainment is said to have various positive consequences for well-being. Since migrants often leave their home country to fulfill their goals, attaining those might have a great impact on their well-being. However, does the attainment of goals, especially important goals, increase migrant well-being or lower ill-being, and if so, which goals promote this relationship? In this study, we aimed to answer this question, positing that goal attainment predicts greater well-being and lower ill-being, and that this relationship is moderated by goal importance. Moreover, we predicted that this relationship may be stronger for some goals than for others. For a qualitative analysis, 288 first-generation migrants were sampled. Participants had to indicate levels of life satisfaction and anxiety. Next, participants listed three of their life goals and indicated their level of attainment and importance of each goal. A Grounded Theory approach was applied to derive different goal content categories based on the self-set life goals participants indicated. Results indicated an effect of goal attainment on well-being and ill-being. However, contrary to expectations, goal importance did not qualify the effect of goal attainment on well-being across the categories. Yet, we observed an interaction between goal attainment and importance on ill-being for the category *Personal Development*. These findings suggest that attainable goals positively affect migrants' well-being. Gaining this insight into what migrants aspire to achieve maybe a helpful contribution for counseling settings to help migrants facilitate their goals, which may affect their integration process.

*Keywords:* Well-Being, Goals, Migrants, Ill-being, Goal Content Categories

### **The Interaction of Goal Importance and Goal Attainment on the Well-Being of Eastern European Migrants in the United Kingdom.**

Around the world, the numbers of migration have increased rapidly. Over 281 million people were international immigrants in 2020, which make up around 3.5% of the world's population (International Organization of Migration [IOM], 2020). Even though this might not seem like a significant number, the estimated percentage of international migrations for 2050 has been estimated at 2.6%, which has already been exceeded by around 1% last year (IOM, 2020). Migrants, who make up a significant percentage of this number, often move to another country to be able to pursue their goals and live freely according to their values (Tartakovsky & Schwarz, 2001). However, despite often moving for the maximization of goals, the migration process can lead to psychosomatic problems and a decrease in well-being, making migrants more prone to mental health problems (Bhugra, 2004; Toth-Bos et al., 2020). The well-being of immigrants varies stronger inter-individually. One core reason is that many immigrants encounter difficulties in fulfilling their goals (Berry & Hou, 2016; Toth-Bos et al., 2019). The attainment of goals is known to be linked to greater well-being and satisfaction (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). Additionally, important goals are said to increase the likelihood to attain these goals (Ryan, et al., 1999). Moreover, one of the factors influencing the migration process is the fulfillment of one's goals (Al-Baldawi, 2002) which is in return be associated with an increase in well-being (Toth-Bos et al., 2020).

The current study focuses on the effect of the attainment of personally important goals on migrant well-being and ill-being. Since the attainment of goals is considered to have a positive effect on well-being and psychological health (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), we claim that goal attainment has a positive effect on migrants' well-being. Recent studies looked at the effect of different goal content categorizations like intrinsic versus extrinsic goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) or preservation versus self-development goals (Chirkov et al., 2008). These

studies work with prefixed categorizations people have to organize their goals into. Therefore, as a downside, these studies neglect self-concordant goals. Self-concordant goals are in line with one's self and are known to be attained more likely, as well as satisfying important needs (Moberly & MacLeod, 2006; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Since just a few studies include self-concordant goals, the present study strives to close this research gap by building on the self-concordant model, asking for individuals' personal goals instead of using fixed categories. Goals that are examined in this study are self-set goals, which are chosen by the individual and, like self-concordant goals, more likely to be attained (Etherton et al., 2020). Moreover, they satisfy basic needs (Etherton et al., 2020). Also, a distinction is made between goal attainment and goal importance to examine how these two concepts influence migrant well-being.

### **Goal Attainment and Migrant Well-being**

Goals are mental representations portraying an anticipated situation a person wants to achieve (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). They are further built in a hierarchy (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Goals can be accessed through conscious effort, and they involve cognitive processes, such as making decisions and taking actions to move toward the desired end-state (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018; Zimmermann et al., 2016).

Getting closer to achieving a goal, or attaining one, has various positive consequences, leading to an increase in well-being, fulfillment of needs, positive affect, and psychological health (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018; Ryan et al., 1999). The relationship between goal attainment and well-being is known in many different areas of psychology (Wong et al., 2017). Attaining goals in domains like sports, education, interpersonal- or self-actualization settings tend to increase well-being (Wong et al., 2017). Since there are many different goal domains migrants pursue when moving to a new country,

like individual growth, achievement, or security (Tartakovsky & Schwarz, 2001), the same effect may apply to the goal domains of migrants.

Moreover, this effect is not just related to everyday life goals, but also long-term goals (Wong et al., 2017). Zimmerman, et al. (2017) looked at the effect of goal on sojourners' satisfaction, emphasizing a relationship between psychological adaptation and sojourn goals. This means, that sojourners' psychological adaptation, so the emotional components of well-being, is linked to how well they perceive their sojourn (Zimmerman et al., 2001). Since psychological adaptation is one of the core factors influencing acculturation (Berry, 1997), gaining more insight into goal pursuit may be a great contribution in understanding factors influencing migrant well-being and decreasing ill-being. Based on these findings, we aim to test the (1) role of goal attainment on migrants' well-being.

**Hypothesis 1a.** Goal attainment has a positive effect on migrant well-being.

**Hypothesis 1b.** Goal attainment has a negative effect on migrant ill-being.

### **Goal Importance and Well-Being**

Another variable considered in the theoretical framework of this study is goal importance, which is a multidimensional and everchanging characteristic of a goal (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). This means that what is considered important is subjective to the individual which holds this goal (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Moreover, goals are changeable with situations and behavior (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Important goals are seen to influence individuals' well-being, as examined in various studies (see e.g., Chirkov et al., 2008; Niemiec et al., 2009; Zimmermann et al., 2016).

The effect of goal attainment on well-being has been discussed extensively before, however, this effect is not the same for the attainment of every goal. Especially important or personally relevant goals are said to be attained more often (Niemiec et al., 1998). A study by Toth-Bos et al. (2020) examined the relationship between goal attainment and goal

importance on migrant well-being. Results found evidence for goal importance being a moderator, meaning that attaining important goals have a greater effect on well-being than attaining any goals (regardless of their importance). However, the question arises why goal importance has such an effect on well-being. Goal importance is in line or can be compared with self-concordant goals, which according to the self-concordant model, are self-chosen goals that are pursued out of autonomous motivation or regulation (Ernst et al., 2018; Moberly & MacLeod, 2006). Looking at the types of motivation one exhibits when pursuing self-concordant goals, namely autonomous, identified, or intrinsic motivation (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), a connection to the Self-Determination Theory becomes evident. Self-Determination Theory highlights the different inherent tendencies for growth and influencing aspects, as well as factors contributing to self-development and self-regulated behavior. Thereby, three elements are emphasized as fundamentally important, namely autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which are seen to be manifested in self-concordant goals. Since self-concordant goals are more important to the individual, it is expected that one is more eager to attain these goals and is, therefore, more successful in doing so. This in return creates a feeling of competence (Gorges et al., 2014). Sheldon and Elliot (1999) suggested that those pursuing self-concordant goals are more likely to engage in actions helping others, which in return satisfies their need for relatedness. Next, striving for self-concordant goals also includes the need for autonomy. As stated earlier, self-concordant goals are determined by autonomous regulation (Moberly & MacLeod, 2006), since they are pursued out of personal interest and importance (Ernst et al., 2018).

An example of goals pursued out of interest are personal projects, which define goals as central and important to the individual (Blunt & Pychyl, 2005), and can encompass everyday achievements as well as life goals (Little, 2014). A study examining the effect of personal projects has shown that those with important and joyful goals experience the most

satisfaction (Palys & Little, 1983). All in all, self-concordant goals encompass the need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, as well as they, enhance well-being (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Whilst many studies examine the effect the importance of a goal has on its attainment, we look at the relationship of goal attainment on well-being and ill-being, moderated by goal importance.

Based on this insight, we aim to test (2) the impact of goal importance on the relationship between goal attainment and migrants' well-being. Hereby, goal attainment is the independent variable influencing migrants' well-being, the dependent variable, whilst moderated by goal importance, as visualized in Figure 1. This reasoning leads to the following hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 2a.** The facilitating effect of goal attainment on well-being is stronger for important goals than compared to non-important goals.

**Hypothesis 2b.** The negative effect of goal attainment on ill-being is stronger for important goals than compared to non-important goals.

### **Goal Content Categories versus Self-set Goals**

Taking previous studies into account, many of those differentiated between different prefixed goal content categories. For example, previous studies based their goal categories on preservation versus self-development goals (Chirkov et al., 2008) or intrinsic versus extrinsic goals (Schmuck et al., 2000). Hereby, intrinsic goals are pursued out of personal interest or motivation, and they tend to fulfill basic needs, whereas extrinsic goals are typically performed to gain some incentive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, categorizing goals by content, like intrinsic and extrinsic, has some downsides. A study by Rijavec et al. (2011) examined the level of satisfaction based on intrinsic versus extrinsic goal categorization. One of their conclusions is that the use of prefixed goal content categories hinders discerning the motivation of goals. While the goal of "having a house" can be seen as an extrinsic goal, for



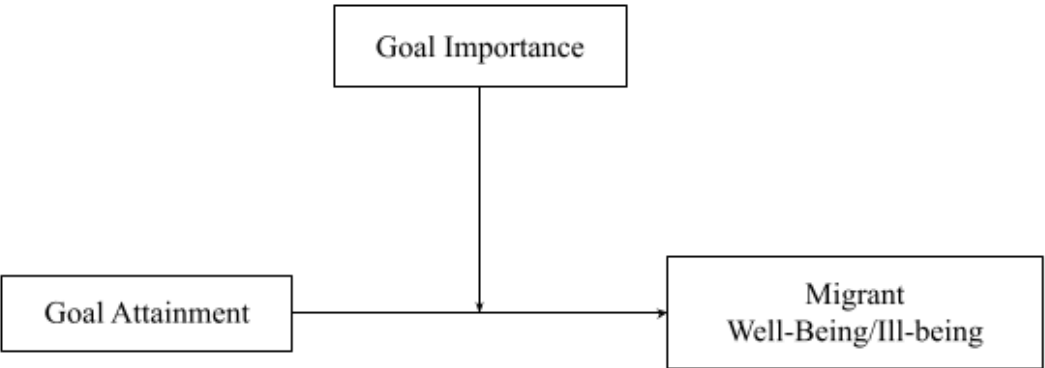
poorer countries this could also be seen as the satisfaction of basic needs, and therefore being an intrinsic goal (Rijavec et al., 2011). Therefore, using prefixed goal content categories does not do justice to the range of different goals and motivations and may lower the ecological validity of migrants’ goal content.

Austin and Vancouver (1996) examined the structure, characteristics, and processes of goals. Based on their findings, in this study, we decided to focus on goal content; what goal domains people have, and the interplay between attainment and importance within one domain. Moreover, based on the study of Rijavec et al. (2011) discussed before, and to avoid the problems resulting from prefixed goal content categories, in this study, we focus on self-set goals, which are chosen by the individual and are not organized into preexisting categories.

Based on this, we applied a Grounded Theory approach to categorize all life goals into broader categories. Therefore, we test their effect on well-being and ill-being separately from each other, assessing the difference between goal content categories. Therefore, we aim to test our hypotheses across all goal content categories.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Moderation Model*



*Note.* The Moderation Model examines the effect of Goal Attainment on Migrant Well-Being/Ill-Being moderated by Goal Importance.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

In our study, a total of 334 first-generation migrants living in the United Kingdom, participated. The final sample consisted of 288 participants, who fully answered the questionnaire (70.2% female and 29.8% male;  $M_{age} = 34.66$ ,  $SD_{age} = 10.43$ ). The participants originated from eight different countries in central and east Europe (e.g., 60.8% from Poland, 11.8% from Hungary, 6.3% from the Czech Republic). Average years lived in the United Kingdom were nearly 10 years ( $M = 9.62$ ,  $SD = 6.43$ ). Examining participants' level of education, 30.2% out of the participants indicated having at least a high school diploma, whilst 2.4% indicated having a Doctorate Degree (Ph.D.). Also, 83.7% indicated currently having a job whilst 16.3% were unemployed. The ECP code of this study is 17444-P. At first, the participants were asked to answer questions about their demographics. Next, levels of satisfaction with life, and anxiety levels were measured. Finally, each participant was asked to list three of their current life goals and rate the level of the personal importance of these goals, as well as the level at which they attained these goals. In the statistical analysis, we analyzed data per goal, not per person, leading up to a final data set of 857 goals.

### **Measures**

#### ***The importance of self-set goals***

All participants got asked to report three of their current life goals using self-set measures and further rate their importance on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*). Participants had to report personal life goals and further rate their importance, with sentences, starting with "I aspire to...", "I want to..." or "My goal is to...". The Cronbach  $\alpha$  for self-set goal importance is relatively low ( $\alpha = 0.6$ ), likely due to the question having

three different beginnings and being of qualitative nature (Shenton, 2004). Cronbach  $\alpha$  being lower than 0.7 is common for short questionnaires (Wanous & Hudy, 2001).

### ***The attainment of self-set goals***

Next, participants were asked to indicate to what degree they had realized each goal on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The same procedure used for indicating the level of attainment was used for indicating the level of importance. Afterward, the average self-set goal attainment score was computed ( $\alpha = 0.7$ ).

### ***Life satisfaction***

We assessed well-being based on migrants' life satisfaction, using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) as a self-report measure ( $\alpha = 0.9$ ). On a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*), participants had to rate how much they agreed with each statement like "In most ways, my life is close to ideal."

### ***Anxiety***

We assessed ill-being based on migrants' level of anxiety, using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-Item Scale (GAD-7) (Spitzer et al., 2006) as a self-report measure ( $\alpha = 0.9$ ). An example item of the scale is "Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems...?" were asked to be rated on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*nearly every time*).

### **Strategy of Analysis**

Our study aims to get an overview of people's life goals. Therefore, we built different goal content categories to examine if our main effect and moderation hypothesis hold within the different categories. To gain an understanding of all the goals which are pursued by the participants, we used the Grounded Theory as a strategy of analysis, building the goal content categories. This type of methodology allows building a solid theory that is also embedded in the data. The first step when building a Grounded Theory is purposive sampling, where

participants and data are selected based on what is most suitable to answer the research question (Chun Tie et al., 2019). For our study, we looked for first-generation migrants, who are best suitable to answer our research question. Before introducing the next step, the constant comparative analysis should be discussed. This is an analytical process where data is coded, and categories are established by comparing the different categories to each other, repeatedly (Chun Tie et al., 2019). This means that we went back and forth between the goal and categories to see if the categories are still matching and made sense. The first coding process is called initial coding. Here, the data is searched for commonalities and differences. Thus, various categories and codes are established, based on a simple and eye-catching commonality. Then, intermediate coding comes into play, which is a more advanced form of coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Codes and categories are formed into more abstract ideas, through reviewing the categories. New broader categories are formed, which include various subcategories sharing similar characteristics. Last, advanced coding takes place, from which very abstract categories emerge (Chun Tie et al., 2019). To accommodate these coding processes, we built small, mid, and broad goal content categories. Through advanced coding, the Grounded Theory is finished, by which the theoretical categories are used to serve as a framework for theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

## **Results**

### **Content Analysis**

Based on the structure of Grounded Theory, we categorized the life goals indicated by the participants from small categories to mid categories and finally to the broad categories used in the statistical analysis.

Our first broad category is called *Achievement*, including 70 life goals indicated by the participants. From several small categories, we built the mid-categories of *Financial*, *Achievement*, and *Success* which built up the broad category of *Achievement*. This category

stands for accomplishments one wishes to attain across several domains. Goals included in this category are for example “I want to earn more money” or “break world record”.

The second broad category is called *Basic Human Striving* and includes the mid-categories *State of Being* and *Health*. This category includes 129 goals and stands for fundamental wishes many people have, for example, “being happy” or “leading a healthier lifestyle”.

Next, the third broad category is called *Migration* and includes 24 goals. Mid-categories of *Migration* are *Move*, *Staying in the UK*, and *Integration*. This broad category stands for the processes involved in the acculturation process, including goals like “learn and be part of the country I am living in” or “become a British citizen”.

The fourth category is the biggest one, including 237 goals called *Personal Development* which includes mid-categories like *Travel*, *Skills*, *Impact*, *Career*, *Personal Development*, *Independence*, and *Freedom*. This broad category includes all goals which are aimed to fulfill goals that are purely related to one’s growth. Examples of goals in this category are “I aspire to be the best version of myself” or “become an excellent singer”.

Next, the fifth broad category is called *Profession* and includes 107 goals. Mid-categories included in this goal category are *Professional*, *Educational*, and *Occupational*. This category stands for the development and acquiring of educational knowledge and work-related goals. Examples of goals in this category are “get Ph.D.”, “find a good and fulfilling job” or “get a good job”.

The next broad category is called *Relationship* and includes 121 goals. Mid-category goals for this goal category are *Family*, *Relationship*, and *Friendship* and stands for goals related to social networks and the wish for connectedness. It includes goals like “I want to have a happy family” or “find my right partner”.

The last broad category is called *Security* and includes the mid-categories of *Material Achievement*, *Living Comfortably*, *Financial Security*, *Retirement*, and *Security*. This goal category includes 147 goals and stands for ensuring a secure future in different life domains. Goals like “be financially independent” or “Pay off mortgage as soon as possible” are included in this category.

### **Preliminary Analysis & Hypothesis Testing**

For the hypothesis testing, we used the statistical software SPSS (Version 27) and the PROCESS macro (Hayes & Little, 2018). To test our hypotheses, we ran a moderated regression analysis with goal attainment as the independent variable, well-being (SWLS), anxiety (GAD-7) as the dependent variable, and goal importance as moderator.

#### ***Achievement***

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the first goal content category of Achievement can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Achievement.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	3.91	1.42				
Anxiety	2.11	.75	-.67**			
Importance	6.27	1.07	-.10	.28*		
Attainment	3.19	1.63	.53**	-.38**	.24*	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

The results revealed a significant main effect of goal attainment on both well-being ( $b = .53, p < .00$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.23, p < .00$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a and 1b. Furthermore,

for goal importance, significant main effects were found for both variables, well-being ( $b = -.39, p < .01$ ) and anxiety ( $b = .31, p < .00$ ). Finally, regarding a potential interaction effect, no significant results were obtained for both the interaction of goal attainment and importance on well-being ( $b = -.07, p < .44$ ) and the interaction of goal attainment and importance on anxiety ( $b = .03, p < .54$ ) (see Table 9 in Appendix A for regression analysis of Achievement), disconfirming Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

### ***Basic Human Striving***

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the second goal content category of Basic Human Striving can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Basic Human Striving.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	4.20	1.30				
Anxiety	2.03	.74	-.34**			
Importance	6.78	.60	.16	-.25 **		
Attainment	4.31	1.58	.42**	-.42**	.20*	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

This analysis found a significant main effects of goal attainment on both well-being ( $b = .33, p < .00$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.19, p < .00$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a and 1b. For goal importance, no significant main effects were found for well-being ( $b = .24, p < .25$ ) as well as for anxiety ( $b = -.13, p < .24$ ). Finally, no interaction effect was found for both variables (well-being,  $b = .11, p < .43$ ; anxiety,  $b = .10, p < .21$ ) (see Table 10 in Appendix A for regression analysis of Basic Human Striving), disconfirming Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

***Migration***

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the third goal content category of Migration can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Migration.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	4.21	1.17				
Anxiety	1.79	.74	-.67**			
Importance	6.29	.81	.01	-.09		
Attainment	4.00	1.50	.46*	-.45*	.07	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

The results revealed significant main effects of goal attainment on both well-being ( $b = .36, p < .03$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.22, p < .04$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a and 1b. Furthermore, for goal importance, no significant main effect was found for well-being ( $b = -.05, p < .88$ ) as well as for anxiety ( $b = -.05, p < .77$ ). The same applies for an interaction effect for the variables of well-being ( $b = .13, p < .66$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.01, p < .96$ ) (see Table 11 in Appendix A for regression analysis for Migration), disconfirming Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

***Personal Development***

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the fourth goal content category of Personal Development can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Personal Development.*



	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	4.23	1.3				
Anxiety	2.03	0.72	-0.36**			
Importance	6.44	.89	-.06	.10		
Attainment	3.67	1.63	.21**	-.29**	.08	

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 5**

*Conditional Effect of the Predictor at Values of the Moderator.*

	<i>Index</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Goal Attainment if Goal Importance is low	-.09	.03	-.16	-.03
Goal Attainment if Goal Importance is high	-.16	.06	-.22	-.10

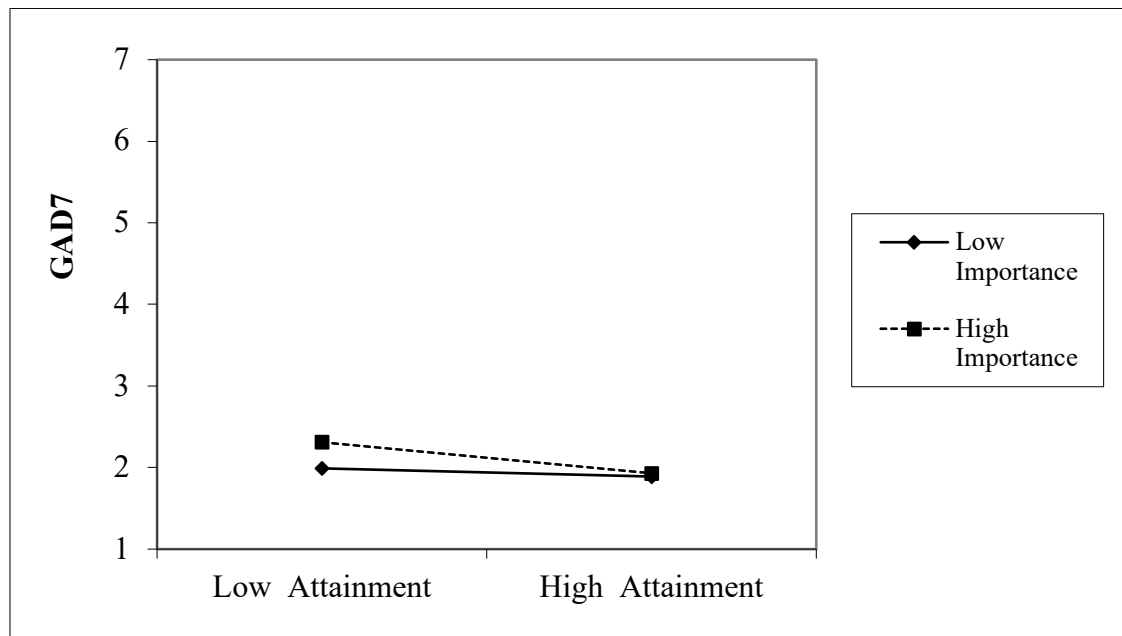
Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

This analysis yielded a significant main effect of goal attainment on both well-being ( $b = .16, p < .00$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.13, p < .00$ ), confirming our Hypothesis 1a and 1b. Also, for goal importance, no significant main effect was found for well-being ( $b = -.10, p < .27$ ). However, for anxiety, a marginally significant main effect of goal importance was found ( $b = .09, p < .08$ ). For well-being there was no significant effect reported ( $b = .06, p < .28$ ), whilst results indicated a significant interaction effect of goal attainment and goal importance for anxiety ( $b = -.07, p < .03$ ), confirming hypothesis 2b. Personal Development goal attainment predicted anxiety for people with high goal importance (effect =  $-.17, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.22, -.11]$ ), and for people with low goal importance (effect =  $-.09, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.16, -.03]$ ). The relationship between the attainment of Personal Development goals and anxiety appeared to be stronger

when those goals were believed to be more important (see Table 5 and Figure 2) rather than less important (see Table 12 in Appendix A for regression analysis of Personal Development).

**Figure 2**

*GAD7 as a Function of the Importance and Attainment of 'Personal Development' Goals.*



### *Professional*

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the fifth goal content category of Professional can be found in Table 5.

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Professional.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	4.16	1.37				
Anxiety	2.00	.79	-.36**			
Importance	6.47	.78	-.13	.03		
Attainment	3.88	1.64	.20*	-.04	.21*	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

The analysis revealed a significant main effect of goal attainment on well-being ( $b = .20$ ,  $p < .02$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a. However, for anxiety, no significant main effect was found of goal attainment ( $b = -.02$ ,  $p < .71$ ), disconfirming Hypothesis 1b. Furthermore, for goal importance, no significant main effect was found for well-being ( $b = -.29$ ,  $p < .11$ ) as well as for anxiety ( $b = .01$ ,  $p < .94$ ). Finally, for well-being there was no significant interaction effect reported ( $b = .05$ ,  $p < .57$ ). The same applied for anxiety ( $b = -.06$ ,  $p < .29$ ), disconfirming our Hypothesis 2a and 2b (see Table 13 in Appendix A for regression analysis for Professional).

### ***Relationship***

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the sixth goal content category of Relationship can be found in Table 6.

**Table 7**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Relationship.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	4.46	1.46				
Anxiety	1.87	.67	-.22*			
Importance	6.72	.64	.02	.04		
Attainment	4.29	1.84	.39**	.13	.30**	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

The results revealed a significant main effect of goal attainment on well-being ( $b = .33$ ,  $p < .00$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a. However, no significant main effect of goal attainment was found for anxiety ( $b = -.06$ ,  $p < .11$ ), disconfirming Hypothesis 1b. Furthermore, for goal

importance, no significant main effect was found for well-being ( $b = -.19, p < .45$ ) as well as for anxiety ( $b = .06, p < .64$ ). No significant interaction effect was reported for well-being ( $b = -.04, p < .71$ ). The same applied for anxiety ( $b = -.03, p < .65$ ), disconfirming Hypothesis 2a and 2b (see Table 14 in Appendix A for regression analysis of Relationship).

### **Security**

Correlations of well-being and anxiety with the attainment of the seventh goal content category of Security can be found in Table 7.

**Table 8**

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Well-Being (SWLS), Anxiety (GAD7), Goal Importance, and Goal Attainment for the Goal Content Category Security.*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Well-Being	Anxiety	Importance	Attainment
Well-Being	3.91	1.48				
Anxiety	1.99	.70	-.38**			
Importance	6.54	.85	.01	.18*		
Attainment	3.29	1.86	.49**	-.33**	.05	

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

The analysis yielded significant main effects of goal attainment on both well-being ( $b = .38, p < .00$ ) and anxiety ( $b = -.13, p < .00$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1a and 1b. For goal importance, no significant main effect was found for well-being ( $b = -.00, p < .97$ ). However, for anxiety, a significant main effect of goal importance was found ( $b = .16, p < .01$ ). Regarding the interaction effect, for well-being there was no significant effect ( $b = .08, p < .31$ ), as well as for anxiety ( $b = -.02, p < .55$ ), disconfirming Hypothesis 2a and 2b (see Table 15 in Appendix A for regression analysis of Security).

## **Discussion**

The present study examines the effect of goal attainment on migrants' well-being and ill-being. Previous studies emphasized the effect of goal attainment on well-being (see e.g., Gorges et al., 2014; Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Relying on a previous study by Toth-Bos et al. (2020) we tested the interaction of goal attainment and goal importance on migrants' well-being and ill-being, using self-set goals. We predicted that goal attainment affects migrants' well-being and ill-being across different goal content categories, particularly for personally highly relevant goals.

Results obtained in the statistical analysis found effects for goal attainment on well-being across all goal content categories, supporting Hypothesis 1a. Therefore, goal attainment affects feelings of contentment with life across all goal content categories. For ill-being, goal attainment was found to affect all goal content categories except for the categories of Professional and Relationship, therefore supporting Hypothesis 1b across the five remaining goal content categories. Since the relationship between attainment on ill-being is negative, goal attainment affects a decrease in ill-being across the goal content categories of Achievement, Basic Human Striving, Migration, and Personal Development.

Regarding Hypothesis 2a and 2b, the analysis yielded no effect for the interaction of goal attainment and goal importance for well-being across the goal content categories, leading to disconfirming Hypothesis 2a. For ill-being, results indicated an interaction between goal attainment and goal importance for the category of Personal Development, supporting Hypothesis 2b for this goal content category. The relationship between the attainment of Personal Development goals and ill-being appears to be stronger when goals are believed to be more important than less important. Moreover, a negative relationship was found between goal importance and well-being for well-being, for the category of Achievement. This suggests that emphasizing the importance of Achievement goals too much negatively predicts well-being. Similar results could be found for ill-being, reporting a positive effect of

importance for Security, Achievement, and a marginally significant main effect for Personal Development goals. Placing greater importance on Security, Achievement, or Personal Development goals predicts an increase in ill-being.

When looking at the results two aspects should be examined in detail. First, even though results suggest support for the positive effects of goal attainment on migrant well-being, results of goal importance indicate a reversed pattern. Results for goal importance on both well-being and ill-being imply that emphasizing Achievement, Security, or Personal Development goals has a negative effect on well-being. Placing too much emphasis on these goals, irrespective of attainment of these goals can have a reversed effect, being more disadvantageous than assumed (Toth-Bos et al., 2018). But why? Looking at the goal content category of, Achievement, this category includes goals like “become rich” or “succeed”. The goal content category of Personal Development includes goals like “open a business” or “travel a lot”. Focusing merely on those goals (e.g., “succeeding”) may lead to the constant worry of not succeeding, or not being or doing good enough. So, even though these goals are set with the intention to better one’s situation, emphasizing them too much can lead to a sort of longing, revealing the absence of dearly wanted factors in one’s life (Mayser et al., 2008). Moreover, Kasser and Ryan (1996) describe the importance of extrinsic goals like these as being detrimental to well-being. Even though our study consists of self-set goals, which possess the ability to better differentiate between the motivation of goals than prefixed goal content categories like intrinsic versus extrinsic goal categories, we cannot predict the motivation behind the goals with total certainty. Therefore, the effect described by Kasser and Ryan (1996) may apply to some of the goals of this study too.

Second, throughout the results, more strongly attaining goals decrease ill-being, but only for personally highly relevant goals for the category of Personal Development. A reason for this could be explained by the underlying motivation of goals included in this content

category. Even though we do not know what motivation stands behind each goal with certainty, goals in this category could be more personally important to the individual than goals in the other content categories. The goal “I aspire to live in harmony with myself” (included in Personal Development goals) is most likely to satisfy basic psychological needs than the goal “save money” (included in Security goals). Therefore, when attaining this goal, especially when important, ill-being is negatively affected. However, this is a bold explanation to give, since not a lot is known about the exact motivation behind each goal.

### **Limitation and Future Direction**

This study is subject to three limitations. The first limitation concerns the motivation of the participants. Throughout this study, we built categories including similar types of goals using the Grounded Theory approach. Even though the self-set goal categories build in this study give more insight into what life goals participants are striving for than prefixed goal content categories like intrinsic versus extrinsic categories, we do not know the motivation behind each goal with certainty. Whilst the motivation of goals in the Personal Development category might be merely to enhance one’s self-awareness and growth, the motivation behind goals in the Security category could be to secure the future of one’s children or to pay off the mortgage. For Basic Human Striving, the motivation could be to become healthier, based on a chronic illness one has, or to improve one’s fitness in a sense of pure self-actualization. Moreover, since the sample of this study exclusively consists of migrants, the problem of the motivation behind the goals goes one step further. Based on the cultural and financial differences with which some of the participants might be grown up and are confronted, the difficulty of predicting the motivation behind the goals becomes even more difficult. Therefore, the motivation behind each goal and goal content category might be entirely different, serving different outcomes and satisfying different basic needs or even none.

Looking into the underlying motives behind the goals of migrants could be the next step for future research, as it would be particularly interesting, given their cultural background.

Second, all participants are first-generation migrants, which involves one obstacle. None of the participants is a native English speaker, so there might be a language barrier that possesses some hurdles. Those could be reflected in erroneous statements or misunderstood questions. Future research may consider this limitation and offer a questionnaire in the participant's native language, as well as a translator with excellent language skills in both languages, to avoid the language barrier and therefore misconceptions.

Third, all scales and items are self-report measures, which are more prone to bias. Also, levels of life satisfaction, anxiety, or goal attainment may be differently understood by different participants and demand a certain level of self-awareness to be answered honestly. Therefore, participants who possess a higher level of self-awareness might be more critical when answering questions about their level of goal attainment and life satisfaction than others. Moreover, indications of the three major life goals range from very detailed goals to broader one-worded goals. Accordingly, the level of depth of the answers indicated ranges from thoughtful plans to very broad constructs. Future research might take this consideration into account and circumvent this limitation by asking for a more in-depth elaboration of the goal.

### **Strengths, Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This study consists of a large data set, containing 288 participants stating three goals, leading to a data set of 857 goals, resulting in more accurately displaying the pattern in the population and enhancing the ecological validity. Previous research did not gain insights into migrants' goals in such great numbers. Besides a study by Toth-Bos et al. (2019), there are only a few studies containing migrants' goal content. Previous research often looked at the distinction between two goal dimensions, like intrinsic versus extrinsic goals (Schmuck et al.,



2000). Although the motivation behind each goal cannot be known with total certainty, the use of self-set goals compared to pre-existing goal content categories have several advantages discussed before and is considered a strength of this study. Through this study, we could gain more understanding of the innermost goals of migrants and what they are striving for.

Therefore, the first theoretical implication is the use of the Grounded Theory to provide a more in-depth perspective into studying the effect of goals on well-being, and more so on what factors influence well-being.

Moreover, this current study is based on a mixed-method study, using, besides the quantitative approach, also a qualitative approach which only a small number of studies applied so far. This qualitative analysis provides more understanding of the thoughts and experiences of migrants, as well as enables to gather a more in-depth understanding of the unknown influence of goal content categories on migrants' well-being.

This leads to the second theoretical implication of using qualitative analysis to gain a more in-depth understanding of the problem at hand.

As far as the practical implications are concerned, we found that the attainment of goals does influence migrants' well-being, throughout the goal content categories. This opens great insight into the work of counselors and governmental institutions concerned with migration. Knowing that the attainment of specific goal domains affects migrants' well-being opens the door to support them attain these goals. Moreover, knowing that putting too much emphasis on specific goal content categories can have a reversed effect on migrants' well-being, creates the opportunity to look behind the motivation of these goals. All in all, the results of this study provide support for counseling settings to look behind the stereotypes and assumptions we hold and use actual findings to better the well-being and fulfillment of migrants.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the results of this study indicate that attaining goals has a positive effect on migrants' well-being, as well as a negative effect on ill-being across the goal content categories. However, putting too much emphasis on goals might have a reversed effect on one's well-being, suggested by the results on goal importance for the categories of Achievement, Security, and Personal Development. Therefore, examining the underlying motives behind goals as well as the cultural and financial differences migrants experience might be an interesting future research avenue. All in all, this study provided additional insight into the strivings and wishes of migrants, which can be implemented in various settings like counseling services and government facilities.

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### Appendix A

**Table 9**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Achievement.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	3.93	1.5	26.84	.00**	3.63	4.22
	Goal Attainment	.53	.09	5.75	.00**	.34	.71
	Goal Importance	-.39	.16	-2.51	.01*	-.70	-.08
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.07	.09	-.77	.44	-.25	.11
Anxiety	Constant	2.10	.08	26.41	.00**	1.94	2.26
	Goal Attainment	-.23	.05	-4.53	.00**	-.33	-.13
	Goal Importance	.31	.09	3.61	.00**	.14	.48
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.03	.05	.62	.54	-.07	.13

*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 10**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Basic Human Striving.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	4.17	.11	38.26	.00**	3.95	4.38
	Goal Attainment	.33	.07	4.75	.00**	.19	.46
	Goal Importance	.24	.21	1.15	.25	-.17	.65
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.11	.15	.79	.43	-.17	.40



Anxiety	Constant	2.02	.06	33.39	.00**	1.90	2.14
	Goal Attainment	-.19	.04	-4.97	.00**	-.27	-.11
	Goal Importance	-.13	.12	-1.16	.24	-.36	.09
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.10	.08	1.25	.21	-.06	.26

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 11**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Migration.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	4.20	.23	18.45	.00**	3.72	4.67
	Goal Attainment	.36	.15	2.32	.03*	.04	.68
	Goal Importance	-.05	.29	-.16	.88	-.65	.55
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.13	.29	.44	.66	-.47	.73
Anxiety	Constant	1.79	.14	12.38	.00**	1.49	2.10
	Goal Attainment	-.22	.10	-2.25	.04*	-.43	-.02
	Goal Importance	-.05	.18	-.30	.77	-.44	.33
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.01	.18	-.04	.96	-.39	.37

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 12**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Personal Development.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	4.23	.08	51.04	.00**	4.07	4.39
	Goal Attainment	.16	.05	3.11	.00**	.06	.26
	Goal Importance	-.10	.09	-1.11	.27	-.29	.08
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.06	.06	1.08	.28	-.05	.18
Anxiety	Constant	2.03	.04	45.70	.00**	1.95	2.12
	Goal Attainment	-.13	.03	-4.62	.00**	-.18	-.07
	Goal Importance	.09	.05	1.77	.08	-.01	.19
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.07	.03	-2.18	.03*	-.13	-.01

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 13**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Professional.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	4.15	.13	31.56	.00**	3.89	4.41
	Goal Attainment	.20	.08	2.44	.02*	.04	.36
	Goal Importance	-.29	.18	-1.63	.11	-.64	.06
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.05	.10	.57	.57	-.14	.25
Anxiety	Constant	2.01	.08	25.60	.00**	1.86	2.17
	Goal Attainment	-.02	.05	-.37	.71	-.11	.08
	Goal Importance	.01	.11	.08	.94	-.20	.22
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.06	.06	-1.05	.29	-.18	.05

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 14**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Relationship.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	4.45	.13	34.26	.00**	4.19	4.71
	Goal Attainment	.33	.07	4.70	.00**	.19	.47
	Goal Importance	-.19	.25	-.76	.45	-.70	.31
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.04	.11	.37	.71	-.18	.27
Anxiety	Constant	1.88	.06	29.22	.00**	1.75	2.01
	Goal Attainment	-.06	.04	-1.60	.11	-.13	.01
	Goal Importance	.06	.13	.47	.64	-.19	.31
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.03	.06	-.45	.65	-.14	.09

Note.  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).

**Table 15**

*Regression Analysis Results for Assessing the Relationship Between Goal Attainment and Goal Importance on Well-Being (SWLS) and Anxiety (GAD-7) for the Goal Category Security.*

DV	Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Well-Being	Constant	3.90	.11	36.18	.00**	3.69	4.12
	Goal Attainment	.38	.06	6.48	.00**	.26	.50
	Goal Importance	-.00	.13	-.04	.97	-.26	.25
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	.08	.07	1.03	.31	-.07	.22

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Anxiety	Constant	1.99	.05	37.06	.00**	1.88	2.10
	Goal Attainment	-.13	.03	-4.34	.00**	-.19	-.07
	Goal Importance	.16	.06	2.48	.01*	.03	.29
	Goal Att. X Goal Imp.	-.02	.04	-.60	.55	-.10	.05

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*Note.*  $p^* < .05$ ;  $** < .01$  (two-tailed significance).