

Araştırma

INVESTIGATION OF LIFE SATISFACTION, MEANING IN LIFE AND LONELINESS LEVELS OF A GROUP OF ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS IN TERMS OF SOME DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Bir Grup Yaşlı Bireyin Yaşam Doyumu, Yaşamın Anlamı ve Yalnızlık Düzeylerinin Bazı Demografik Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

In this regard, the purpose of this study was to analyze the degrees of older individuals' life satisfaction, meaning of life and loneliness within the frame of dynamics of life. In accordance with this aim, "Meaning in Life", "Life Satisfaction Scale" and "UCLA Loneliness Scale" were applied to 96 participants (51 males and 45 females at the ages of 60 and above) living in Fatih and Kağıthane in İstanbul. The participants were selected via the method of convenient sampling. In the study, life-meaning, life-satisfaction and loneliness scores did not show significant differences with regards to demographic variables ($p>.05$). Yet, it was found that there was a statistically meaningful relationship between the levels of life meaning and life satisfaction ($r=.266$; $p<.01$).

The findings of this study presents crucial information about psychology of older adults. Beyond gender, age and so on the perspectives of older people toward life is an important factor determining the quality of his life. It shows us that as the older adults will get satisfied with every minute of his life as long as they lead a life reminding them of the reason for their existence.

Keywords: *Successful aging, life meaning, life satisfaction and loneliness in old age.*

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı yaşlı bireylerin, bazı demografik değişkenlerle birlikte, yaşam doyumu, yaşamın anlamı ve yalnızlık düzeyleri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Bu araştırmada, uygun / elverişli örnekleme yöntemiyle İstanbul ilinin Fatih ve Kağıthane semtlerinde yaşayan 60 yaş ve üzeri 96 katılımcıya (51 erkek, 45 kadın) "Yaşamın Anlamı Ölçeği", "Yaşam Doyum Ölçeği" ve "UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği" uygulanmıştır. Araştırmada yaşamın anlamı, yaşam doyumu ve yalnızlık düzeyleri puanları demografik değişkenlere göre farklılaşmamıştır ($p>.05$). Ancak yaşamın anlamı

ve yaşam doyum düzeyleri arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur ($r=,266$; $p<,01$). Bu araştırmadaki bulgular, yaşlılık psikolojisi alanında önemli veriler sunmaktadır. Cinsiyet, yaş vb. değişkenlerden öte yaşlı bireyin yaşama nasıl baktığı, onun hayat kalitesini belirleyen bir unsurdur. Yaşlı bireyin kendi varoluş sebebini hatırlatan bir yaşam sürdürdükçe yaşamın her dakikasından tat alabileceğini bizlere göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Başarılı yaşlanma, yaşlılıkta yaşamın anlamı, yaşam doyumu ve yalnızlık.

INTRODUCTION

Each period of life is unique with its distinctive characteristics. Psychological, physical and social changes occurring between the times of birth and death make each developmental period special. One of these periods is the old age period following the end of the adulthood period and resulting in death. On the other hand, aging refers to the whole biological differentiation in a person's life.

In all times and at all places people have tried to make sense of the way people age. The concepts of old age and aging had been regarded as topics of artistic and literary work in the history of aging from antiquity through to the 20th century (Achenbaum & Hendricks, 1999; Moog & Schäfer, 2008; Ottaway, 2006). Aspects of aging had written until the 20th century by many authors within the context of age-related conditions and in sense of critical enquiry. Physical changes of older people had been in first place and exercise, healthy nourishment and good medical care were suggested. Scientists had been more concerned with the medical

and physical aspects than psychological aspects of the aging problem (Anderson, 1960; Mulley, 2012)

Since 1940's there have been many studies based on the social psychology of aging. Kansas City studies and Chicago studies in which it was matter of the meanings of work and retirement, social roles, the process of growing old, successful aging, the relations of life satisfaction to social interaction and the concept of adaptation, serve as an example (Havighurst, 1968). The growth of the older population and the lack of mental health services in this area have played role for counselors to begin work with older persons in gerontological counseling. Nevertheless, no services providing age counseling or psychological counseling and guidance to the old persons had been available until 1972 (Myers, 1995).

The world population will likely increase to 9.2 billion in 2050. In consequence of declining fertility and increasing longevity, the populations are ageing speedily. Half of the growth in the world population between 2005 and 2050 will be explained by an increase in the population aged 60 years and over. Additionally, in the more developed countries, the population aged 60 years and over is predicted nearly to double whereas that of populations under aged 60 quite likely will decrease (United Nations, 2007). Therefore, the increasing proportion of older persons in the population calls for expanded attention to their psychological needs. Studies dealing with issues about providing psychological counseling have recently increased due to the reasons including the acceleration of the technological developments and the medical enhancements in the health sector and so on. Especially after

the industrial revolution, there have been changes in the family and community structures causing older adults to alienate and isolate themselves from their own lives and to feel less satisfied in life. These changes from agriculture to manufacture set in a motion a series of economic and social trends. The effects of those trends have brought about change in the role and status of older persons as well as in the economic function of extended family. Therefore, the fundamentals of a successful aging process are important both for people providing the older psychological counseling and for researchers dealing with this target group (Anderson, 1960; Burgess, 1960; Durak, 2013; Kalkan, 2008).

Successful aging may be defined from the viewpoint of the relatives, friends and neighbours of aging people. From a psycho-social perspective, successful aging embodies various dimensions such as savor of life, life-satisfaction, maintaining social relationships, dealing effectively with changes caused by aging and facilitating the process of adaptation to aging by means of adaptive strategies. When there is a harmony between the internal and external relations, the adaptation will be relatively easy and aging will be successful (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005; Havighurst, 1977; von Faber, van der Wiel, van Exel, Gusekloo, Lagaay, van Dongen, Knook, van der Geestand & Westendorp, 2001). In other words, successful aging is possible when people accept and improve themselves, strengthen their social communication by establishing positive relationships with others, maintain control on their environment and continue their autonomous structure by making their own decisions. People who have passed through

a successful aging process are satisfied with their lives, can add meaning to their lives in line with certain goals and values, maintain their social communication and do not isolate themselves from social life. All types of adaptive behaviors facilitating the successful aging process give rise to the increase in the individuals' life satisfaction and their level of finding life meaningful in addition to helping them to feel less lonely (Ho, Yeung & Kwok, 2014; Durak, 2013).

According to Krause (2004), life satisfaction refers to the degree of agreement between the targets of individuals aim to achieve and what they have achieved so far. Unless there is a large gap between their targets and their achievements, their life satisfaction level is high. Otherwise, they experience disappointments and regrets. According to the "Activity Theory" and the "Social Learning Theory", individuals have higher levels of life satisfaction if they continue their activities as they did in the past, move towards a certain direction as they feel themselves useful to carry out a certain task, devote themselves to something they find meaningful and feel hopeful (Heo, Stebbins, Kim & Lee, 2013). Thus, it would be fair to state that "health, social position in society, perceived personal control and social interaction" are determining factors of life satisfaction. Particularly when the effects of "health and social position" are standardized, the "social interaction" variable can result in changes in the individuals' levels of life satisfaction. The reality reveals how important individuals' relationships with others are (e.g. joining in an activity with their spouses and meeting with them).

As individuals are social beings, they feel the need to belong to a community.

When they cannot meet this need sufficiently, they have the feeling of loneliness. In this case, both their mental health and their subjective well-being are deeply influenced (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). What is worse is that as they get older, their loss becomes sadder. This loss ranges from the death of close friends and spouses to the loss of social status after retirement and the emerging health problems. Consequently, old people holding the idea that their life quality is dwindling cannot derive pleasure from life and assume that they live in a meaningless life period. Although experiences related to loneliness differ from one person to another, all of them have a negative mood (Routasalo & Pitkala, 2003). This mood might also bring about the sense of meaninglessness in their lives.

One of the most important features that separate human beings from animals is the power of thinking. This power leads to sense-making that forge a link among factors such as events, situations and people. What lies at the heart of sense-making is making connections among concepts, and thus develop the sense-making skills (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Moore (2000, 2006) and David (2001) argue that old people must catch continuity in time so that they can attain self and mental integrity in the last stage of their lives. They can do so on condition that they can combine past, present and future. Moreover, instead of isolating themselves from the community, older adults feeling themselves useless because of the changing social roles should take part in meaningful activities in which they can show to themselves and to others that they can make a difference

by taking up a more active role in the society. Despite age-related losses of all kinds, it is significant for individuals to have the feeling that it is worth living. For that reason, it is necessary to attribute a meaning to life. Only by these means older adults can cling to the hope and be aware of the importance of breathing. This is possible only when they feel that life is meaningful.

In the light of the explanations above, the present research study aims to investigate older adults. The purpose of this research is to analyze the relationship between life satisfaction, meaning of life and loneliness of older adults with some demographical changes.

METHOD

In this part of the study, the research design, population and sample, data collection instruments and data analysis are explained.

Research Design

Aiming to explore the life satisfaction, meaning in life and loneliness levels of a group of older adults depending on some demographic variables, this research study uses a descriptive method (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2012). More specifically, how satisfied older adults are with life, to what extent they find life meaningful and how lonely they feel themselves are investigated and whether their levels of life satisfaction, meaning in life and loneliness differ with regards to the variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational background and home-environment. It would also be true to state that the

study is designed as a relational survey model as the relationship among life satisfaction, meaning in life and loneliness levels of the target group are also focused within the scope of this study.

Population and Sampling:

The population of the study includes older adults who are at the age of 60 and above. The sample group is comprised of individuals living in Fatih and Kâğıthane districts of the İstanbul province. The method of sampling used for the study is convenience sampling. By means of this method of sampling, the cost, time and the labor for the study is minimized. In convenience sampling, the researcher continues to collect data starting from participants that are easily accessible until the sample size intended for the study is reached. When the intended number of participants is reached, the sample groups take shape (Büyükoztürk et al., 2012).

Out of 96 participants taking part in the study, 51 (53,1%) were male while the remaining 45(46,9%) were female. 65,6% of the participants were between the age of 60-69 while 34,4% were 70 or above. When it comes to their marital status, it was found that 68,8% were married while 31,3% were not married. As for their educational backgrounds, 11,5% of the participants were illiterate, 61,5% were literate at the level of primary school, 14,6% of them were graduates of secondary/high school and 12% graduated from university/graduate programs. Regarding their home-environments, it was found that 10,4% lived in their own houses alone while 89,6% lived with their families.

Data Collection Instruments:

The data of the study were obtained through four data collection instruments: “Demographic Form”, “Meaning in Life”, “Life Satisfaction Scale” and “UCLA Loneliness Scale”.

Demographic Forms: The “Demographic Form” developed by the researchers’ aims to identify socio-demographic information about the participants. This form containing five questions is intended to collect demographic information about participants’ gender, age, marital status, educational level and their home-environment.

Meaning in Life Scale (MLS): Meaning in Life Scale (MLS) developed by Steger, Patricia, Shigehiro and Matthew (2006) was adapted into Turkish by Akın and Taş (2015). The scale aims to assess what life means for the individuals. Including 10 seven-point Likert-type items, this scale is comprised of two sub-dimensions: “Presence of Meaning” and “Search for Meaning”. Each of these sub-dimensions has five items. Items 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9 make up the “Presence of Meaning” sub-dimension while items 2, 3, 7, 8 and 10 constitutes “Search for Meaning”. Item 9 is reverse coded. The score to be obtained from the scale ranges from 7 to 70. Individuals having high scale scores are considered to have high levels of meaning in life (Akın & Taş, 2015).

Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS): Aiming to reveal to what extent individuals are satisfied with life, the “Life Satisfaction Scale” was developed by Diener, Emmons, Laresenand Griffin (1985). The scale is comprised of five seven-point Likert-type items (cited in Dost, 2007). The range of score to be obtained from

the scale is between 5 and 35. The higher score a respondent gets in the scale, the higher level of life satisfaction he/she has. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.85. On the other hand, item test correlations ranges from 0.71 to 0.80 (cited in Tmkaya, Hamarta, Deniz, Çelik and Aybek, 2008).

UCLA Loneliness Scale: "UCLA Loneliness Scale" was developed in 1978 by Russell, Peplau and Ferguson in order to assess individuals' levels of loneliness by considering their social relations. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Yaparel (1984) and Demir (1990). The scale includes 20 four-point Likert-type items, 10 of which are formulated in the form of positive statements (1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19,20) while the remaining 10 are in the form of negative statements (2, 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17,18). Therefore, the positive statements are simply coded while the negative statements are reversely coded.

The total score range of the scale changes from 20 to 80. The total score represents the "General Loneliness Score". Higher scores can be interpreted as higher loneliness levels (Demir, 1990).

Data Analysis:

The data collection instruments used in this study were applied in the spring term of the 2013-2014 academic year. 96 older adults (60 years old and above) living in Fatih and Kağıthane districts were given the scales and the data was coded by means of the SPSS 21.0 program. The data was analyzed using independent sample t test, Mann-Whitney U test and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

FINDINGS

The findings are illustrated in the tables below in line with the research questions. The findings presented on tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are related to the first research question seeking an answer to the question whether the total scores of the older adults in the "Meaning in Life Scale", "Life Satisfaction Scale" and "UCLA Loneliness Scale" differ depending on the gender, age, marital status and home-environment variables.

As can be understood from Table 1, as a result of the independent samples t-test carried out to reveal whether the scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales differ with regards to the gender variable, it was found that the difference between the arithmetic means of the groups was not statistically significant ($p>.05$). According to this research, older people's life satisfaction, meaning in life level and perceived loneliness do not differentiate by gender significantly.

As can be seen in Table 2, the independent samples t test used to determine whether the scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales show any difference depending on the age variable revealed that the difference between the arithmetic means of the groups was not statistically significant ($p>.05$). In present research, older adults life satisfaction, meanings of their life and perceived loneliness do not differentiate by age.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the independent samples t test carried out to realize whether the total scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales differ depending on the marital status variable.

Table 1. Results of the Independent Samples t Test Applied to Identify whether the Scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales Differ Depending on the Gender Variable

Score	Groups	N	\bar{X}	s	Sh \bar{x}	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Meaning in Life Scale	Female	45	53,29	9,40	1,40	-,924	94	,358
	Male	51	55,38	12,61	1,77			
Life Satisfaction Scale	Female	45	23,40	7,95	1,18	-,044	94	,965
	Male	51	23,47	7,83	1,09			
UCLA Loneliness Scale	Female	45	34,64	9,51	1,42	-,086	94	,932
	Male	51	34,49	8,15	1,14			

Table 2. Results of the Independent Samples t Test Applied to Identify whether the Scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales Differ Depending on the Age Variable

Score	Groups	N	\bar{X}	s	Sh \bar{x}	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Meaning in Life Scale	60-69	63	54,24	11,12	1,40	-,187	94	,852
	70 -...	33	54,70	11,57	2,01			
Life Satisfaction Scale	60-69	63	23,15	7,64	,96	-,479	94	,633
	70 -...	33	23,97	8,31	1,44			
UCLA Loneliness Scale	60-69	63	34,71	8,91	1,12	,233	94	,816
	70 -...	33	34,27	8,60	1,49			

According to the results, older adults's, meaning in life level, life satisfaction and perceived loneliness do not differentiate by marital status ($p>.05$).

As can be realized in [table 4](#), the results of the Mann Whitney-U Test applied

to reveal the significance of the difference in the scores of Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales depending on the participants' home-environment variable showed no statistically significant difference between groups ($p>.05$). According to the

Table 3. Results of the Independent Samples t Test Applied to Identify whether the Scores in the Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales Differ Depending on the Marital Status Variable

Score	Groups	N	\bar{x}	s	Sh \bar{x}	<i>t</i> Test		
						<i>t</i>	Sd	<i>p</i>
Meaning in Life Scale	Married	66	53,95	11,01	1,35	-,555	94	,585
	Unmarried	30	55,37	11,78	2,15			
Life Satisfaction Scale	Married	66	23,33	7,33	,90	-,192	94	,848
	Unmarried	30	23,67	8,99	1,64			
UCLA Loneliness Scale	Married	66	34,32	7,97	,98	-,403	94	,688
	Unmarried	30	35,10	10,43	1,90			

Table 4. Results of the Mann Whitney-U Test Applied to Identify the Significance of the Difference in the Scores of Meaning in Life, Life Satisfaction and UCLA Loneliness Scales Depending on the Home-environment Variable

Score	Home-environment	N	\bar{x}_{sira}	\sum_{sira}	U	z	<i>p</i>
Meaning in Life Scale	Own House/ Alone	10	32,40	324,00	269,00	-1,93	,053
	With Family	86	50,37	4332,00			
	Total	96					
Life Satisfaction Scale	Own House/ Alone	10	37,60	376,00	321,00	-1,31	,191
	With Family	86	49,77	4280,00			
	Total	96					
UCLA Loneliness Scale	Own House/ Alone	10	58,50	585,00	330,00	-1,20	,230
	With Family	86	47,34	4071,00			
	Total	96					

results, older adults's meaning in life, life satisfaction and perceived loneliness do not differentiate significantly by living alone at their home or with their family.

According to the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis as it is seen in the figure above, determines older adults's meaning in life, life satisfaction and loneliness, there is no meaningful relation between meaning in life and loneliness levels of older adults ($p>.05$); positive relation between meaning in life and life satisfaction; medium-level negative relation between perceived loneliness and life satisfaction ($p<.01$). In other words, as older adults's meaning in life level increases, life satisfaction increases too, yet when they feel lonely it decreases the life satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that older adults' life satisfaction did not vary in accordance with the socio-demographic constructs including age, gender, marital status and home-environment. However, according to Karataş (1990), life satisfaction levels of the older adults differ depending on the gender, age, education and marital status variables (cited in Kurt, Erkol and Beyaztaş, 2010). In addition, Özer (2001) collected data from older adults living in nursing homes and from those living with their families and concluded that there was a relationship among educational background, marital status and life satisfaction levels of the older adults (cited in Özer and Karabulut, 2003).

On the other hand, Hamarat, Thompson, Steele, Matheny and Simos

(2002) revealed that life satisfaction levels of older adults did not show significant differences depending on the age variable. For these researchers, the personality characteristics of older adults do not change in time and their perspectives of life remain the same. It is argued that to what extent older adults individuals are satisfied with life rests on their personality characteristics; therefore, there is no change in their life satisfaction levels depending on their ages. Thus, it would be true to state that their findings corroborate with the results of the current study.

Based on the outcomes of the present study, meaning in life of older adults did not diversify in respect to the same demographic terms. Regarding the gender and age variables, Steger, Oishi and Kashdan's (2009) study also revealed findings overlapping with the results of the present study.

Moreover, loneliness levels of older adults did not alter depending on the demographic variables. In Routasalo and Pitkala's (2003) study, it was pointed out that the results pertaining to the relationship of gender and marital status with loneliness were conflicting. Still, in the same research study, it was indicated that the loneliness levels differ depending on the age, educational level and their home-environment variables. Low educational level and living in a nursing house are considered to be related to high loneliness scores.

According to the study the more intensity of the loneliness felt by the older adults increases, life satisfaction provided decreases. It also seems that sense of life they live in is associated with the satisfaction that they provide

Table 5. Results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Applied to Identify the Relationship between the Scores of Meaning in Life Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale and Life Satisfaction Scale

Variables	1	2	3
Meaning in Life	1		
Loneliness	-.154	1	
Life Satisfaction	.266*	-.388*	1

* $p < .01$

from the life. Related to the this point Holmen and Furukawas' (2002) study with older adults showed that the satisfaction with social contacts was very close connected with feelings of loneliness and they stated that meaningful social contacts are an important part of well-being. On the other hand, many studies have consistently demonstrated relations between measures of meaning and well-being. Those who feel their lives are meaningful are more optimistic and self-actualized, experience more self-esteem, and positive affect as well as less depression and anxiety and less suicidal ideation (Steger & Kashdan, 2007; Steger et al., 2009). From a theoretical point of view, the relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction was first presented by Neugarten. According to Neugarten, there are five conditions for life satisfaction in the old age period: to delight in activities, find life meaningful, feel that their objectives are accomplished, have a positive self-perception and look at the positive aspects of life (cited in Özer and Karabulut, 2003).

In Reker and Woo's (2011) opinion, older adults have existential needs and concerns. These concerns arise from various feelings such as the sense of mortality, the feeling of exclusion and

finding life meaningless. When these concerns are not taken into consideration, existential stress occurs, meaning the decrease of life satisfaction. Individuals who can not find a meaning in life in the existential context are regarded as the ones regretful of the things they have experienced or have not been able to experience. The relevant finding of the present study is in parallel with this reality.

In conclusion, the results of the study provide valuable data in the field of old age psychology. Rather than variables such as age and gender, older age individuals' perception of life is a factor determining their life quality. Also loneliness is an important indicator of well-being among older adults (Grenade & Boldy, 2008). For understanding the risk of loneliness and exploring the meaning of loneliness to older adults there is a need more in-depth researchs and longitudinal studies.

People shaping their own lives in a positive way, actively taking part in social activities, and thus being aware of the reason for their existence can enjoy every bit of their lives. Besides, as they feel self-worth, they more strongly believe that they can make a difference in the world. This belief positively

influences their physical and psychological health. For that the older adults have to be provided with maximum opportunities to keep on a part of their communities and maintain a good quality of life.

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