

## Ageism, psychological capital and life satisfaction: a study on elderly women

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at to find the relationship between ageism (benevolent and hostile ageism), psychological capital (optimism, resilience and self-efficacy) and life satisfaction among elderly women. Sample for this study has been collected through convenient sampling method from three districts of Odisha, India. Ambivalent Ageism scale was used to measure benevolent and hostile ageism. The satisfaction with life scale (SwLS), Brief Resilience Scale, Life-Orientation Test, and General self-efficacy scale was also used in this study. Total number of participants was 30 women (age group of 60 or above). The current study adopted a correlational design. Results found that benevolent ageism is positively associated with life satisfaction and psychological capital whereas hostile ageism is negatively related with life satisfaction and psychological capital among elderly women. Moreover, it was also found that life satisfaction among elderly women is positively associated with psychological capital.

**Keywords:** *Ageism, Psychological Capital, PsyCap, Life Satisfaction, Elderly*

**A**ging process is unpreventable. The process of growing old is very crucial and many people find it difficult as well. When people move toward the process of aging they started taking themselves away from the young age group which makes them to feel negative towards their own age and incapable of doing certain things. Many times, the stigma attached to aging is, it makes people unattractive, dependent, incompetent and emotional (Atchley, 1997). Elderly people are perceived as dependent, slow, sick, emotionally not stable, stubborn in many societies (Schaefer, 1983). These negative connotations attached to old age can make the elderly more vulnerable, to feel helpless and could prevent them to achieve successful aging. Ageism is a worst kind of discrimination like sexism, racism etc. Butler (1980) defined ageism as the negative attitudes of others as well as the old people toward themselves and the process of aging. However, Palmore (2001) suggested ageism can be of both positive and negative. Prejudice against age is common and it was found from a study that young men experience more ageism and depression than old female (Lyons et al., 2017). Rupp et al, (2005) found ageism is more noticeable among young males but it is evident that both male and female experience ageism (Levy & Banaji, 2004). If we take

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cultures into consideration people from both individualistic and collectivist culture hold negative stereotypical attitude towards elderly (Cuddy et al., 2005).

Ageism can be very detrimental for the old age groups. Findings suggested that negative attitude can affect the motivation level, self-efficacy of the elderly (Levy, 1996) and may increase the tendency to have cardiovascular diseases (Levy et al., 2000). Ageism was found positively correlated with poor mental health, depressive symptoms and health problems among elderly (Lyons et al., 2017). Result from the previous study also show that perception about age discrimination is significantly related with symptoms of depression amongst the elderly (Ayalon, 2016).

### ***Life satisfaction of elderly***

Researches in the area of aging have always fascinated on the wellbeing of individual as they grow old. The common perception of people regarding old age is that life satisfaction gradually decreases with increasing age. This is probably due to the negative connotations associated with late adulthood which includes the problems ranging from physiological to psychological aspects. Finding suggested that life satisfaction is more between 40s to early 70s and after that it starts decreasing (Baird et al., 2010). With this elderly female are found to have high in life satisfaction compare to males (Macia et al., 2015; Vinsi, 2014). Many times, the senility phase of life is also associated with gaining more life experience and emotional regulations and competencies (Kunzmann et al., 2000). There are many factors which are found to lead elderly towards successful aging and subjective wellbeing. Lewinsohn et al. (1991) studied the relationship between life satisfaction and psychosocial variables, they found many psychosocial variables are highly correlated with life satisfaction. The person with greater life satisfaction are found to be more involved in activities, socially skilled, happy with the company of others and more optimistic over negative aspects of their life (Bulman & Wortman, 1977). In addition to this financial condition and good interpersonal relationships are found as the main predictors of life satisfaction in old age (Macia et al., 2015).

Markides and Martin (1979) found that greater functional ability during old age is positively linked with life satisfaction among the elderly. Similarly, subjective perception about one's health is highly linked to life satisfaction (Berg et al, 2006; Hamashima, 1994). Findings suggested physical health is hardly any relationship with lower life satisfaction (Puvill et al, 2016), whereas Choudhary (2015) found that there is a significant negative correlation between physical health and life satisfaction among old. Moreover, it was also found that poor mental health is significantly related to low life satisfaction (Puvill et al, 2016). Adams et al, (2015) found that 'depressive symptoms and perceived stress' are negatively related with life satisfaction, whereas social support was found to be a notable predictor of high life satisfaction.

Joseph et al. (2014) examined life satisfaction among the aged who are staying in institutions or old age homes. The result from their study revealed that more than half of the participants expressed a moderate level of psychological well-being as per test score. Steel et al. (2008) found future expectations and person's temperament are the moderators of life satisfaction. In addition to this, findings also show that good marital relationship is positively correlated with life satisfaction.

### ***Psychological capital and the elderly***

Psychological capitals (PsyCap) are the internal tendencies of an individual which emphasizes more on positivity over negativity. PsyCap usually constitute of having high level of Hope, Optimism, Self-efficacy and Resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). These qualities help individual to cope with adverse life situations in a better way.

### ***Optimism***

Optimism is the tendency to expect positive things to occur in future. Optimist persons are more likely to follow healthy behaviour and it helps individual to adapt in the stressful situation (Conversano et al. 2010). Optimism is found to be highly correlate with wellbeing (Gallagher & Lopez, 2009). Research finding suggested that when the old people hold positive attitude towards aging despite of the negativity associated with getting old, the aging process will become more positive (Keller et al., 1989). It has been noticed that optimism helps to improve physical functioning and depressive symptoms among elderly people (Wurm & Benyamini, 2014). Bain et al. (2003) found optimism is significantly associated with quality of life of the aged.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is the belief of an individual, about his/her ability to complete a task (Bandura, 1997). A research study was conducted to explore the predictors of self-efficacy among elderly, results found that physical activity and social involvement was as the significant predictors of self-efficacy (Perkins et al., 2008). The elderly who believe that they are high in self-efficacy and those who involve in more physical activity have experience more satisfaction with life and low in depressive symptoms (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Kim (2013) found self-efficacy as a strong predictor of successful aging among the elderly population.

### ***Resilience***

Old age resilience has been characterized as being flexible and ability to cope with adverse life situations (Staudinger et al., 1993). Resilience helps elderly to achieve wellbeing and meaningful life in spite of having illness and problematic situation. Many researches have been conducted to find out the association between resilience and different types of diseases. High resilience has been found to positively related with wellbeing (Mamta & Sharma, 2013), successful aging, less mortality risk and good quality of life among elderly (Netuveli, 2008). Resilience has been also found to be positively related with life satisfaction, good family functioning (Hayat, Khan & Sadia, 2016). Many studies have been found high resilience is negatively associated with less depressive symptoms (Li et al., 2015; Netuveli, 2008), Alzheimer diseases (Melendez et al., 2018), chronic pain (Schure et al., 2013).

### ***Rationale and gap analysis of the study***

Many studies have been conducted on focusing the relationship between optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and old age issues in consideration to their physical and psychological health. From the above literature it can be noticed that no study has been found including more than one element of PsyCap in one study. On the other note ageism is an emerging issue of elderly which can affect a person's entire life course. Though researchers have looked into the old age issues but ageism is still overlooked. Very few researches have been found on ageism in Indian context. In a country like India women are often left behind and taken as dependent and burden to the family. Thus, it creates curiosity among many people to know the journey of an Indian woman toward successful aging. From the above literature review no such study has been reported in India which focuses on the relationship between human positive PsyCap and self-ageism and its effect on their life satisfaction. Therefore,

the present study attempts to find out the inter-correlation among ageism (benevolent & hostile), PsyCap and the life satisfaction among elderly women. For the present study the researcher has only used three elements of PsyCap including optimism, self-efficacy and resilience.

### ***Objectives of the study***

The objective of the present study is;

To examine the inter-relationships between ageism (benevolent, hostile ageism), PsyCap (optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy) and life satisfaction among elderly women.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample***

The present study adopted a correlational research design. It includes total numbers of 30 elderly women. Participants were selected through purposive sampling method from three districts of Odisha (Khordha, Puri and Balasore), India. The participants for the present study were among the age group of 60 years and above.

### ***Instruments***

The following measures were used in this study,

- 1. Ambivalent Ageism scale:** Ambivalent ageism scale was developed by Cary et al., (2017). This scale consists 13 items in which 4 items measure hostile ageism and 9 items measures benevolent ageism. The subjects are supposed to read each item carefully and indicate his/her degree of agreement or disagreement on a seven-point rating scale. The S's response to each item are scored 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 for strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, Agree, strongly agree respectively.
- 2. The satisfaction with life scale (SwLS):** The satisfaction with life scale was developed by Diener et al. (1985). It has five items that assess an individual's global judgement of life satisfaction as a whole. The respondent indicates his/her response in a seven-point rating scale where 1 is strongly disagree, 2 is disagree, 3 is slightly disagree, 4 is neither agree nor disagree, 5 is slightly agree, 6 is disagree, 7 is strongly agree.
- 3. Psychological Capital:** The psychological capital includes optimism, self-efficacy and resilience. Since the researcher has not found any specific scale dedicated to measure PsyCap which includes all the elements, therefore different scales available to measure three interested elements has been combined in a single form and given to the participants. Brief Resilience Scale was developed by Smith et al., (2008), Life-Orientation Test was developed by Scheier et al., (1994) and the General Self-efficacy scale (GSE) was developed Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The respondents were told to indicate their agreement in a five-point rating scale.

### ***Procedure***

Total numbers of 30 respondents were taken from different places in Odisha. A good rapport was initiated with them and verbal informed consent was taken individually from each participant before starting the data collection process. All the data were collected individually. The instructions were given properly to everyone and clear all the doubts regarding the questionnaire and the research. Those of them who were not able to read English, the researcher read out each item and translate them into their desirable language. The participants indicated the responses by themselves in the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, the researcher thanked them for their cooperation.

**RESULTS***Table No. 1 Inter-correlation matrix in the dimensions of benevolent ageism, hostile ageism, life satisfaction and psychological capital*

	Benevolent ageism	Hostile ageism	PsyCap	Life satisfaction
Benevolent ageism	1	-.167	.269	.266
Hostile ageism	-.167	1	-.178	-.185
PsyCap	.269	-.178	1	.357
Life satisfaction	.266	-.185	.357	1

The above table shows the results of the inter-correlation between benevolent ageism, hostile ageism, PsyCap and life satisfaction. The result shows that there is a positive relationship between psychological capital and life satisfaction ( $r = .35$ ). PsyCap and life satisfaction are the part of subjective well-being, and it includes positive aspect of human life. All these dimensions of are helpful for better psychological functioning of the individuals. Though life satisfaction includes physical, psychological and social satisfaction of an individual but psychological factor always plays an important role to determine both physical and social wellness. Previous studies had done in the specific dimensions of psychological capital and findings suggests that resilience, hope is related to positive emotional functioning and resilience helps to enhance the psychological well-being (Pezent, 2011). However, the present study used the combinations of optimism, self-efficacy and resilience. Though the result is not significant but it also shows a positive correlation between psychological capital and life satisfaction.

Results also shows that hostile ageism is negatively correlated with life satisfaction ( $r = -.18$ ) and PsyCap ( $r = -.17$ ). There is no supportive study has been found on the relationship between PsyCap and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is linked with positive aspect of human life whereas hostile ageism is related to negative attitude which may cause the negative correlation between ageism and life satisfaction. This means when life satisfaction increases the ageism decreases and vice-versa.

From the inter-correlation matrix, it can be also noticed that benevolent ageism is positively associated with life satisfaction ( $r = .26$ ) and PsyCap ( $r = .26$ ). It means benevolent ageism; Psychological Capital and life satisfaction are increasing and decreasing together. However, none of these relationships were statistically significant.

**DISCUSSION**

The study was conducted to understand the positive aspect of aging of Indian elderly women. To understand the scenario in a better way the researcher has used ageism scale, which measure their ageist attitude towards themselves. Due to urbanization break up in the joint family system the generation gap is widening day by day which affect their journey towards successful aging. Though the results of the current study are not enough significant but it gave desirable outcome. Besides these the study outcomes were not based on an experimental study, so causal relationship can't be established. In simpler terms it can't be said that one variable of interest causes other variables and vice versa. The findings of the present study will help in delineating the negative perception and attitude of elderly by

providing adequate counselling to the elderly. Furthermore, it can be used in policy making of related field and results will be helpful to design intervention for elderly especially women.

The current study was having some limitations of including very less number of participants which may not represent the true characteristics of the population. Therefore, it is suggested to include more participants for a desirable outcome. Moreover, study does not take into account other intervening variables like duration of staying with old people, other age group, place of domicile, personality etc. which could have an effect on the variables. In addition to this study is purely a quantitative research so there may the social desirability effect and fixed response set is always there.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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