

Comparative Study

Impact of Ego Virtues in Middle and Old Ages: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

According to Erikson, development process of an individual passes through eight distinct stages. Each stage is marked by a psychological conflict, the successful resolution of which, results in the development of ego virtue/ strength. Each stage is associated with the development of a specific ego virtue depending upon the conflict marking the developmental stage. The conflicts marking the stages of middle and old ages are generativity vs stagnation and integrity vs despair respectively. The resulting virtue for middle age is care, while that for old age is wisdom. Purpose of the present study is to find out the impact of ego virtues in middle and old age people. An attempt has been made to find the ego virtues by Ego Virtues Inventory developed by Dr. R.D. Helode (2018). Here, 60 samples are taken in four different groups. In every group, 15 samples are taken. The groups are as follows- Middle age (male), Middle age (female), Old age (male) and old age (female). Results indicate that the mean value (Old age male = 7.03 and old age female = 7.35, overall mean of old age = 7.19) are above average and also, it is more than the scores of middle age persons (Middle age male mean value = 6.90, Middle age female mean value = 6.82, overall mean value of middle age = 6.86). In comparison between males of old and Middle Ages, the mean value is higher among the old age males. Old age female scores of mean values are higher than the mean value scores of middle age females. The mean values of old age females are more in comparison to middle age females, which has been statistically significant at 0.05 level. Other t-tests were not significant. So, it may be concluded that old age males and females have shown more strength in ego virtues in comparison to middle aged people, which has also been found among the variation of scores between males and females. Old age females have shown more stable differences in comparison with middle aged females. So, in the present study, it has been found that there is an impact of ego virtues in middle and old aged people and the latter group has shown more strength in ego virtues than the other.

Keywords: *Old Age, Middle Age, Ego Virtues, Development, Ego Strength, Eriksonian Development*

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Erik H. Erikson, an influential psychoanalyst, gave the psychosocial theory of development, where he stated that development takes place in clearly defined and sequential stages and each stage is marked by a crisis or conflict that needs to be successfully resolved for development to proceed smoothly [1]. Erikson described a series of eight stages occurring during the lifespan of an individual, with regards to the basic ego quality that emerges during each stage [2]. The resolution of the conflicts may lead to either regression and maladjustment when resolved unsuccessfully, or growth and subsequent development of specific strengths or virtues when resolved satisfactorily [1].

According to Erikson, middle aged adults experience a conflict between *generativity and stagnation* [3]. It is marked by a concern with productivity, creativity and establishing guidelines for the next generation for a life within the culture. Failure to generate and be productive results in stunting of growth and a sense of stagnation [2,3]. Virtue of *care* results during this stage which encompasses sharing one's knowledge and skills with those who need them, through teaching or supervision [2].

The last stage of development, old age, is characterized by a core conflict between *integrity and despair*. Integrity may be thought of as a state in which an individual is able to integrate one's experiences, beliefs, attitudes in order to form a coherent whole, resulting in a feeling of satisfaction with life in general [3]. Successful resolution of this crisis results in the virtue of *wisdom* which can be described as a detached yet active concern with life in the face of approaching death [1,2]. Unsuccessful resolution of this conflict may result in a sense of despair and a feeling that life is meaningless [2].

Studies in the area of psychosocial development have made an attempt to understand the change in level of ego virtue with respect to ageing. Newton, N. J., et al (2019) conducted a longitudinal study in which they found that the generativity and ego integrity linearly increased over time, while stagnation and despair tend to decline with age [4]. In another study, Rani, G. S. & Devi, M.S. (2017) assessed the levels of wisdom among retired professionals in India. They found that retired professionals between 61-65 years of age experienced above average wisdom, whereas majority of others experienced average levels of wisdom. Also, retired men were found to experience more wisdom in comparison to retired women [5].

As level of ego virtue changes with development, it may have an impact on the functioning of an individual. This has been confirmed through the study conducted by Dezutter, J. et.al. (2020), who interviewed 327 adults living in nursing homes every six months in order to understand the level of ego integrity versus despair and their resulting psychological functioning. They found that three main groups emerged – Integrated, Struggling and Despairing groups, out of which, the Integrated group exhibited the most optimal psychological functioning. They also reported that psychological functioning declined as ego integrity declined [6]. Another study by Gruenewald, T. L. (2012) confirmed that greater perceptions of generativity are related to better functioning and longevity over time in older adults [7]. The presence of ego virtues is also believed to have an impact on the level of life satisfaction and sense of well-being which has been corroborated through the study conducted by Rani, G. S. & Banu N. (2017), in which they found that life satisfaction was significantly and positively related to the level of wisdom [8]. Üzar-Özçetin, Y. S., & Ercan-Şahin, N. (2020), through their study, reported that a lack of ego integrity led to negative perceptions of life, a lack of future plans, and existential suffering [9].

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It is also believed that although the level of ego virtues varies according to age, certain personality factors may also influence the strength of these ego virtues. These findings have been shown through the studies conducted by Westerhof, G. J. et.al. (2017) and Mo'meni, K., et.al. (2017), through which they reported that traits like extraversion and openness to experience are related to a sense of integrity and generativity, whereas neuroticism is related to feelings of despair and stagnation [10,11].

So, the purpose of the present study is to assess the comparison between the impact of ego virtues among middle age and that in old age people.

METHOD

Objectives

- To study the impact of ego virtues in middle age persons.
- To assess the impact of ego virtues in old age people.
- To evaluate a comparison between the strength of ego virtues among middle age and old age persons.
- To determine the gender differences among ego virtues in middle and old age people.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant impact of ego virtues in middle age persons.
- There will be a significant impact of ego virtues in old age people.
- There will be a significant difference in the strength of ego virtues among middle age and old age persons.
- There will be a significant gender difference among ego virtues in middle and old age people.

Sample

- The total sample size for the current study was 60 (N=60), out of which, 30 belonged to middle age group (40-60 years) and 30 belonged to old age group (60-80 years).
- Equal number of male and female subjects were chosen among both age groups.
- Sampling design was random sampling.

Inclusion Criteria –

- Persons belonging to age groups of middle and old age (40-80 years)
- Both males and females
- Persons who can read and write

Exclusion Criteria –

- Persons younger than 40 years
- Persons older than 80 years
- Persons who are unwilling to participate
- Persons who are unable to read and write
- Persons having physical and mental illness

Tools

The Ego Virtues Inventory developed by Dr. R.D. Helode (2018) was used to measure the strength of ego virtues among middle and old age people. The scale consists of 80 items which require a yes/no response and can be completed in 15-20 minutes.

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Procedure

The subjects were made to feel comfortable and rapport formation was done with each participant before the questionnaire was given out to them. They were explained about the procedure and confidentiality was ensured. A consent for participation was also sought by the subjects. The questionnaire was then handed out to them to respond to it.

Statistical Tools

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- t-test

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 – Tabular representation of scores, mean and standard deviation of middle age males

	Hope	Will	Initiative	Competence	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
	10	8	6	5	8	9	6	5
	8	4	5	8	8	7	8	7
	7	4	4	8	9	7	9	7
	10	3	7	8	8	8	6	5
	10	4	4	6	9	4	7	7
	8	5	7	6	6	8	4	6
	10	6	8	8	6	8	8	7
	7	7	7	8	7	10	7	7
	7	4	6	8	9	6	8	8
	6	5	9	9	8	9	7	7
	7	8	7	10	10	8	9	7
	7	3	4	7	5	7	7	5
	6	6	6	8	8	7	6	6
	6	6	7	8	5	4	8	9
	9	5	6	8	4	5	8	7
Mean	7.86	5.2	6.2	7.66	7.33	7.13	7.2	6.66
Standard Deviation	1.55	1.61	1.47	1.23	1.75	1.76	1.32	1.11
				Mean of Middle Age Males	6.90			
				Standard Deviation of Middle Age Males	1.66			

Table 2 – Tabular representation of scores, mean and standard deviation of middle age females

	Hope	Will	Initiative	Competence	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
	8	8	7	9	8	9	9	7
	5	6	1	7	7	9	7	7
	5	5	3	8	2	5	7	5

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	9	7	7	9	8	10	10	8
	9	6	8	8	5	8	9	7
	7	7	6	7	7	7	9	8
	7	7	5	9	6	5	8	8
	6	6	6	4	7	7	7	7
	8	8	4	7	7	8	7	4
	8	5	3	10	6	5	6	7
	7	6	7	8	6	8	8	8
	4	4	3	6	4	5	6	1
	8	7	5	10	9	8	9	9
	9	7	6	9	6	9	9	6
	10	4	1	9	5	10	7	8
Mean	7.33	6.2	4.8	8	6.2	7.53	7.86	6.66
Standard Deviation	1.71	1.26	2.21	1.60	1.74	1.80	1.24	2.02
				Mean of Middle Age Females	6.82			
				Standard Deviation of Middle Age Females	1.96			

Table 3 – Tabular representation of scores, mean and standard deviation of old age males

	Hope	Will	Initiative	Competence	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
	8	5	6	9	6	9	8	9
	8	6	6	5	6	4	8	5
	9	4	9	9	5	6	8	6
	8	5	6	8	7	7	9	8
	5	3	5	10	8	5	7	3
	9	7	4	9	6	7	8	6
	7	6	7	9	8	9	9	6
	9	6	5	6	6	10	8	6
	9	5	5	8	8	10	8	8
	7	4	1	7	6	9	9	4
	8	7	6	10	7	7	9	8
	6	6	7	8	6	5	7	8
	8	7	5	10	8	8	8	5
	7	7	8	10	8	6	8	9
	6	6	7	8	7	7	8	9
Mean	7.6	5.6	5.8	8.4	6.8	7.26	8.13	6.66
Standard Deviation	1.24	1.24	1.85	1.50	1.01	1.86	0.63	1.91
				Mean of Old Age Males	7.03			
				Standard Deviation of old Age Males	1.71			

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Table 4 – Tabular representation of scores, mean and standard deviation of old age females

	Hope	Will	Initiative	Competence	Fidelity	Love	Care	Wisdom
	9	5	6	10	8	9	10	9
	9	7	5	10	8	8	10	7
	8	4	6	9	3	4	7	8
	8	3	7	10	9	9	9	7
	10	8	8	10	8	10	9	8
	8	8	4	10	8	6	8	7
	8	5	7	8	7	4	5	7
	7	8	6	10	8	10	9	9
	7	6	6	8	4	7	8	7
	8	6	5	9	6	5	8	7
	8	7	5	8	8	6	9	7
	6	5	5	9	8	9	10	8
	7	5	4	6	5	7	6	5
	8	8	6	10	6	7	8	9
	7	6	9	10	8	6	8	8
Mean	7.86	6.06	5.93	9.13	6.93	7.133	8.26	7.53
Standard Deviation	0.99	1.57	1.38	1.18	1.75	1.99	1.43	1.06
				Mean of Old Age Females	7.35			
				Standard Deviation of Old Age Females	1.74			

Table 5 – Tabular representation of mean and standard deviation of middle and old age persons

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Middle Age Persons	6.86	1.82
Old Age Persons	7.19	1.73

Table 6 – Comprehensive tabular representation of middle age and old age males and females

	Mean	Standard Deviation	p-value (Middle Age & Old Age Males and Females)	Remarks
Middle Age Males	6.90	1.66		
Old Age Males	7.03	1.71	0.57	Not Significant
Middle Age Females	6.82	1.96		
Old Age Females	7.35	1.74	0.03	Significant

RESULT DISCUSSION

The results indicate the presence of greater strength of ego virtues among old age people (mean value = 7.19) as compared to middle age people (mean value = 6.86). Old age persons have also been found to exhibit more stable patterns (SD = 1.73) of ego virtues as compared to middle age persons (SD = 1.82). A similar pattern has also been noticed in comparison of middle and old age males and that of middle and old age females. Old age males have been found to have greater strength of ego virtues (mean value = 7.03, SD = 1.71) in comparison with middle age males (mean value = 6.90, SD = 1.66), while the same results can be seen in the case of old age females (mean value = 7.35, SD = 1.74) versus middle age females (mean value = 6.82, SD = 1.96). The mean values of old age females are more in comparison to middle age females, which has been statistically significant at 0.05 level (p-value = 0.03), whereas, in the case of males, it has been found to be non-significant at 0.05 level (p-value = 0.57).

The results of the present study indicating a higher level of ego virtues among old age confirms the findings of previous study done by Newton, N. J., et al (2019) stating that ego virtues tend to increase with increasing age and tends to follow a linear pattern. These findings are also in agreement with Erikson's theory that once the crises are successfully resolved, the virtue tends to increase while the maladjustment tends to fade as age increases. The same trend has been seen among males of middle and old ages as well as females of both age groups. Although the current study agrees with that done by Rani, G. S. & Devi, M.S. (2017) on older persons experiencing high ego virtues, it contradicts their findings that wisdom tends to decrease post the age of 71-75 years. The stated contradiction could be attributed to the individual differences in physical and cognitive decline owing to a difference in the results of the studies.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the present study was to assess the comparison of the impact of ego virtues among middle and old age persons. The ego virtues of middle and old ages were observed and different scores were tabulated and analysed. From the analysis it has been found that the hypotheses that there will be a significant impact of ego virtues in middle age people and old age people have been found to be true. The hypothesis that there will be significant difference in the strength of ego virtues among middle age and old age persons has also been found to be true. The strength of ego virtues has been found to be higher in old age people as compared to middle age people. The same has been found to be true in the comparison between old age and middle age males, as well as old age and middle age females. With regards to gender differences in the impact of ego virtues among middle and old aged males and females, the mean values of old age females are more in comparison to middle age females, which has been statistically significant at 0.05 level. Other t-tests were not significant.

So, in the present study, it has been found that there is an impact of ego virtues in middle and old aged people and the latter group has shown more strength in ego virtues than the other.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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