

Research Paper

Subjective Wellbeing as Function of Age and Gender of Elderly People

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ABSTRACT

The emergent problem of the well-being of elderly people has attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers, particularly after the influx of western culture. The emergence of the nuclear family, larger settlement in urban areas and changing mindset and functions of women has led to the redressal of the issues of well-being in general and subjective well-being in particular. Keeping this view in mind, this study was undertaken on 105 elderly people of middle-class families in urban areas of Darbhanga of which 56 were men and 49 were female respondents. For measuring subjective well-being, two scales namely, Diener et al. satisfaction with one's life and PANAS were used. To measure differences in male and female respondents' scores obtained on life satisfaction and positive and negative affect, a t-test was employed. On the other hand, Pearson's coefficient of correlation was computed to obtain the relationship between age and two components of subjective well-being. Findings reveal that life satisfaction was found significantly higher in elderly female respondents than male respondents. However, the affective balance was found significantly higher in male respondents than in females. Age was found positively correlated with life satisfaction and negatively correlated with affective balance. Findings were discussed in the light of previous research.

Keywords: *Subjective Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, Affective Balance*

Ageing is a natural phenomenon. It has several opportunities as well as challenges. If we look at the Census of India, 2011, we found that India has approx. 104 million older people having more than 60 years of age. It constitutes around 9% of our total population. The number of elderly people is increasing day by day due to better health facilities and quality of life. The women population is remarkably high signalling the resistance capacity and longevity female population. This issue has attracted the attention of researchers and policymakers due to changes in our social system and family structure. The concept of the joint family has now confined itself to books. Several changes have taken place in our social systems. Working people are migrating to urban areas for employment. Their children are now settled at their place of work for better education. Only the old and non-working populations share a large proportion of the population in villages. Elderly people living in urban areas also feel isolated. Because their children are settled somewhere.

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This has created a major issue in the health and well-being of elderly people (Day, 2012; Jivraj, 2014).

The government of India has drafted and implemented several policies for elderly people which National Policy on Older Persons 1999, Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 and National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011 etc are some important legal frameworks for supporting the needs of seniors. The Ayushman Bharat programme has taken a special initiative to provide dedicated healthcare to elderly people (Srivastava, 2021).

Srivastava et al. (2021) pointed out in their research problems being faced by elderly people on several fronts. Due to ageing, several restrictions are imposed by the family members on taking a decision independently. It leads to the development of illness, anxiety and depression. If they are given the opportunity, it helps them against depressive symptoms (Bojorquez-Chapela, 2012; Boyle, 2008). It is our culture that permits older people to decide family matter and younger people are bound to follow and obey the decisions taken by the elders. It is believed that elder people are more experienced and a large extent impartial to all. The trends are changing, and the respect and taking decisions largely depend upon the current status of older people in terms of their economic contributions and household helps. It has been found that elderly people who are more involved in positive social support, feeling socially connected and participating in social activities etc. are supposed to be healthy and have very low levels of psychological stress (Kumar et al., 2023a; Kumar et al. 2023b).

According to Stone and Mackie (2013), “Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people experience and evaluate their lives and specific domains and activities in their lives”. It is also known by the name of “self-reported well-being” (Layard, 2006). Diener et al (2000) defined subjective well-being in terms of “people’s cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives.” Similarly, Kashdan (2004) defined subjective well-being both in terms of cognitive and affective parameters. “Cognitive appraisal describes how we consider our global (overall) life satisfaction and our satisfaction with specific domains. Affective appraisal concerns our emotional experience”. Her family life, career etc are examples of cognitive appraisal and feelings of strong positive affect like joyful, happy, contented etc. are examples of affective appraisal. It has also been defined in terms of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

In our culture, it is being seen that older male people are seldom involved in family activities, playing and recreational activities with other people especially grandchildren, extending domestic help etc. Females, on the other hand, do a lot of household activities, caring for grandchildren, and other members despite having several physical problems of old age. As a result, well-being and longevity of life are generally found high in women than men (Banerjee & Baker, 2020; Dauma et al., 2017).

Banerjee & Baker (2020) examined the effect of demographic and psychosocial factors on life satisfaction and the positive affect of 45 plus years age group. It was found that age, household resources, safety, literacy status etc. are linked with life satisfaction. The financial provider status of elderly people has emerged as a predictor of life satisfaction. Srivastava & Muhammad (2021) examined the correlates of change in living arrangements and the subjective well-being of older people. It was observed that approx. 4% of older changed their living arrangements. They reported the marriage of their children or the death of their

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spouse for this reason. It was further observed that those older people who changed their living arrangements also reported low life satisfaction than those who did not change their living arrangements. With regard to gender differences in the subjective well-being of elderly people, diverse results have been obtained.

Pinquart et al. (2001) reported a low level of subjective well-being of males than elderly females. Zebhauser et al. (2014) found that older men reported lower levels of subjective well-being than females. The reason was the diversified range of female activities like caring for their son, daughter, and grandchildren, supporting in the kitchen etc. Elderly males feel difficulties in developing intimate relationships with others and continuing such relationships. Thus, there is a need for a fresh look at the age and gender factors involved in the well-being of elderly people.

Objective and Hypothesis

The objective of the present study was to explore the level of subjective well-being of elderly people and ascertain the effect of age and gender on it. In the present research, subjective well-being has been operationally defined in terms of frequent positive affect and infrequent negative affect and life satisfaction. Keeping this in view, the following hypotheses were advanced:

1. There would no difference between male and female on components of subjective well-being.
2. There would be a significant correlation between age and the subjective well-being.

METHODS

Sample

The present study was undertaken on a sample of 105 elderly people having diverse backgrounds residing in Darbhanga town. The purposive sampling technique was employed to choose respondents. Their mean was 64.06 years and the age range was 60 to 72 years. Altogether 56 male and 49 respondents participate in the study and recorded their responses on the questionnaires given to them.

Measures

A schedule was prepared for the present study which was comprised of the following scales:

1. **Demographic Information:** This section was comprised of demographic information like age, gender, occupation etc.
2. **Life Satisfaction Scale:** Diener et al. (1985) developed a scale to measure what extent respondents are satisfied with their life (SWOL). It is a self-measuring scale comprising 5 items. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale. The responses are ranging from Not at all (0) to Always (5). This is a very reliable and valid scale and is widely used in various cultures.
3. **Positive and Negative Affect Scale:** This scale is popularly known as PANAS (Diener et al., 2010). It is an abbreviation of the positive and negative affect scale. It consists of 12 items of which 6 are positive and the remaining six are negative items. Items on both positive and negative affect are both generic and specific. Its reliability has been re-established in different populations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To ascertain the difference between elderly male and female respondents on positive and negative affect and life satisfaction, a t-test was applied and to measure the relation between age and two aspects of well-being namely affective balance and life satisfaction, Pearson's

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Coefficient of Correlation was computed and predictive effect of age and gender on subjective wellbeing was ascertained by computing multiple regression.

Gender and Subjective Wellbeing

To measure the mean difference between male and female elderly respondents on the dimensions of subjective well-being, a t-test was computed. The results are given in table-1. It showed the mean score of life satisfaction of the female respondents is 19.4286 and the male respondent is 18.6250. The obtained t-test (($t=2.570$, $p<.000$) reflects a significant mean difference in the scores of the life satisfaction component. The female respondent's scores are higher than their counterparts. It can be, therefore, said that the life satisfaction of elderly women is significantly high.

The mean score of elderly men on positive affect ($M= 25.6250$) is slightly higher than females ($M= 25.1429$). the obtained t-value is insignificant ($t=.875$, $p>.05$). thus, it slightly reflects a higher positive affect on elderly men. On the other hand, on negative affect, elderly women scored higher ($M= 19.1429$) than elderly men ($M=18.1250$). the obtained t-value is 2.107 which is significant at a .03 level ($P<.038$). The affective balance was calculated by subtracting the value of the negative affect score from the positive affect score. The mean difference between males and females was computed to ascertain the level of affective balance. It was found that male respondents scored ($M=7.5000$) higher on affective balance than female respondents ($M=6.0000$). the obtained t-test value is 2.192 which is significant at .031.

Table-1 t-test showing the significant mean difference between male and female on dimensions of subjective well-being

Subjective Wellbeing	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-ratio	Sig.
Life Satisfaction	Male	56	18.6250	2.13680	2.570	.012
	Female	49	19.4286	.50000		
Positive Affect	Male	56	25.6250	2.89553	.875	.384
	Female	49	25.1429	2.72336		
Negative Affect	Male	56	18.1250	2.33598	2.107	.038
	Female	49	19.1429	2.61406		
Affective Balance	Male	56	7.5000	3.45885	2.192	.031
	Female	49	6.0000	3.54142		

The findings reveal the fact that female respondents' life satisfaction was reported higher. They very easily adjusted themselves to family members and mixed with grandsons and granddaughters along with a son and his wife. The female respondents are non-working; therefore, they are used to the social bonding prevailing there. The male counterparts, on the other hand, find it difficult to adjust themselves to the family after retirement. They are not used to interacting and gossiping and doing household activities, therefore they feel difficult to cope with stress after retirement. The patriarchal system of society also adheres them to interact the family members (Carmel, 2019). They are supposed to be the guardian and heads of the family despite the fact their sons are now adults and take over most of the activities of the family. The status they earned during their jobs does not pay much after retirement as they expect. It has resulted in lower life satisfaction. On the other hand, affective balance or affective well-being of elderly males was found better (Waghmare, 2017). They are supposed to be normal in expression despite may have several problems. Weeping or crying is not supposed to be ideal for men. The socialization of our culture plays

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a bigger role in managing affective balance. The negative affect on women is seen in several cases. They became tensed at the onset of negative events. Therefore, women's negative affect was found higher.

Age and Subjective Wellbeing

To measure the relationship between age and components of subjective well-being, Pearson coefficient of correlation was computed. The obtained results are presented in table-2. It is observed here that life satisfaction is positively associated with life satisfaction scores ($r=.194$, $p<.05$). As age is increasing their life satisfaction is also improving accordingly. However, a negative correlation was found between age and affective well-being ($r=-.193$, $p<.05$). People are losing affective balance as their age is increasing. The possible reason may be poor health, the feeling of isolation, and losing importance in the family and society.

The problem of subjective well-being was at stake earlier in the West. The main reason was the prevalence of individualistic and materialistic societies. This was earlier not seen in urban and rural India. The entrance of globalization into our society has given us several benefits and opened new avenues of jobs, marketing, business, education etc. It has also hammered on the norms, values, and ethos of our traditional society. Despite the settlement of families in cities, the feeling of jointness was prevalent in our society. All family members of two or three generations come together at special functions and festivals. They support each other and also help others who are needy or not having a proper source of income. Now, the relationship of the married son with their fathers is not conducive in several families. The wife is not liking to stay with her in-laws. Thus, the mother and father are living separately even in the same city. As a result, the subjective well-being of elderly people is at stake (Dey et al., 2012).

Table-2 Correlation showing the relationship between age and dimensions of wellbeing

Variables	Age	Life Satisfaction	Affective Wellbeing
Age	1	.194*	-.193*
Satisfaction with Life	.194*	1	.150
Affective Balance	-.193*	.150	1

CONCLUSION

Subjective well-being is influenced by several factors in which age and gender are important. In this study, it was found that the life satisfaction of elderly females is comparatively higher than males. Positive affect as well as affective balance was found higher in male respondents than female respondents. This has revealed the fact that females, especially homemakers are used to spending their time in household activities and their problems of engagement do not arise much. The elderly men found themselves in isolation after retirement. Therefore, their life satisfaction is affected much more than elderly females.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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