



ISSN: 0975-833X

RESEARCH ARTICLE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND AGE AMONGST MALAYSIAN GRADUATES

*¹SoheilaPanahi, ¹AidaSuraya.MdYunus, ¹Rusnani.Abdul Kadir, ¹Wan Marzuki. Wan Jaafar and ²Mohammad SaeedPanahi

¹Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

²Faculty Member of Neurology, Medical Science University of Hamedan, Iran

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th December, 2013
Received in revised form
20th January, 2014
Accepted 09th February, 2014
Published online 25th March, 2014

Key words:

Psychological well-being, Autonomy,
Environmental mastery, Personal growth,
Positive relationship with others,
Purpose in life, self-acceptance.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine whether there are significant relationship between age and psychological well-being components among graduate students. Psychological well-being is measured using the Scales of Psychological Well-being with six dimensions including: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. A total of 534 graduate students (155 males and 379 females) were selected from one Malaysian university. Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation. The finding of this study revealed significant correlation between age and autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life and overall psychological well-being. In addition, the result indicated that majority of the respondents practiced moderate level in the six dimensions. However, there were no significant correlation between age and environmental mastery, positive relationship, and self-acceptance among the graduate students.

Copyright © 2014 Soheila Panahi et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

An individual's perception of himself changes with time, becoming more related to temporary differences as he grows older and less related to interpersonal comparisons. It is crucial to note that young people, the middle-aged and the elderly have different perspectives of themselves, depending on whether they are evaluating or describing the present, the past, or the future. All these perceptions are important in fully understanding psychological well-being. Hence, the experience an individual acquires during one's lifetime can change the ideals to which he aspires and the way he assesses his own well-being (Birren and Renner, 1980). Young people perceive themselves as making significant progress since their adolescence and have great expectations for the future so the scores in their self-assessments for the dimensions of purpose in life and personal growth are higher (Ryff, 1991). Middle-aged people tend to remain in a continuous process of improvement from the past to the present and maintain high levels of well-being in the different dimensions that constitute well-being. On the contrary, elderly people constantly consider themselves in relation to the past and do not perceive sensations of developing towards the future. From a positive perspective, elderly people tend to master the environment better than those in other age groups. To summarize these,

research such as that the one conducted by Ryff (1991) observed that as people grow older, the difference between their ideals and their perception of reality seems to diminish. One of the ways to get closer to understanding the concept of psychological well-being is to study the factors associated with it. Psychological well-being can vary greatly in relation to age. Some authors, such as Ryff and Keyes (1995), consider that elderly people experience less personal growth. They also suggested that mastering the environment and autonomy increases as people reach the older stages of life. Mastering the environment tends to be better in the middle-aged and elderly than in young people, but remains stable from middle-age to older ages. A similar pattern can be observed with the dimension autonomy, but in this case, the increase in this particular parameter from young to middle-aged people is less acute. According to these authors, the dimensions of self-acceptance and positive relations with others do not seem to vary with age. Similarly, Ryff (1989) also claims that standard dimensions of well-being, such as purpose in life and personal growth, tend to become less important with age, and hence becoming most extreme in elderly people.

In relation to demographic information and psychological well-being components, a cross-sectional survey was carried out by Ryff and Singer (2008) in the US amongst the youth, the middle aged and older adults. Some dimensions identified incremental profiles with age (e.g., autonomy and environmental mastery), whereas others demonstrated sharply

*Corresponding author: Soheila Panahi, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

decremental profiles from young adulthood to aging (e.g., purpose in life and personal growth), and the rest illustrated small age disparity (e.g., positive relations with others and self-acceptance only for women). Daraei (2012) conducted a survey to identify social correlates of psychological well-being among undergraduate students in Mysore. Analysis of ANOVA was applied to examine the data for a total of 240 students, 52 of whom were in governmental colleges and 188 in private colleges. Among the participants, 134 (55.8%) were in the age groups of 19 to 20 years and 106 (44.2%) were 21 to 22 years old. Meanwhile, 125 (52.1%) are males and 115 (47.9%) are females. In this population, 177 (73.8%) are Hindu, 36 (15.0%) Muslims and 27 (11.3%) Christians. The results revealed no association between age and psychological well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The combination of Descriptive and Correlational Study design was utilized in this study. In order to select the samples, proportional sampling technique was applied to select students from each faculty. In this study, Ryff's (1989) psychological Well-Being scale was utilized. It is one of the most widely applied scales to assess psychological well-being. This scale was divided into six different components (Ryff, 1989) which were analyzed independently. The response required is based on six point likert scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Each subscale has 14 items, making a total of 84 items.

The dimensions analyzed were:

- Autonomy - assesses self-determination, independence, and an internal locus of control.
- Environmental mastery - measures one's ability to manipulate and control complex environments.
- Personal growth - measures one's needs to actualize and realize one's potentials.
- Positive relationships - assesses the ability to love, trust, and establish deep relationships with others.
- Purpose in life - measures one's sense of directedness and goals.
- Self-acceptance - assesses positive attitudes held toward the self

RESULTS

Levels of Respondents' Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being was measured by using the questionnaire developed by Ryff (1989). Table 1 shows the respondents' levels of psychological well-being. The levels of psychological well-being are divided into three levels, namely, low, moderate and high, based on construct. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents practiced moderate level in the six dimensions. In addition, compared to other subscales of psychological well-being, the percentage of the respondents was the highest in the moderate level of autonomy (78.5%), and this was followed by self-acceptance (68.4%). On the other hand, the respondents practiced the highest level

in positive relationship (33.5%) ($M = 44.82$, $SD = 5.73$) and the lowest level in autonomy (7.1%) ($M = 60.29$, $SD = 9.62$).

Table 1. Levels of Respondents' Psychological Well-being

Subscale	Range	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Autonomy	Low (26-39.66)	77	14.4%	44.82	5.73
	Moderate (39.67-53.32)	419	78.5%		
	High (53.33-67)	38	7.1%		
Environmental mastery	Low (36-44.33)	135	25.3%	47.14	4.39
	Moderate (44.34-52.66)	345	64.6%		
	High (52.67-61)	54	10%		
Personal growth	Low (36-50)	82	15.4%	59.32	8.61
	Moderate (50.1-64)	307	57.5%		
	High (64.1-78)	145	27.2%		
Positive relationship	Low (34-50.67)	80	15%	60.29	9.62
	Moderate (50.68-67.34)	275	51.5%		
	High (67.35-84)	179	33.5%		
Purpose in life	Low (31-45.67)	133	24.9%	55.62	8.09
	Moderate (45.68-60.34)	327	61.2%		
	High (60.35-75.01)	74	13.9%		
Self-acceptance	Low (33-49)	115	21.5%	55.42	7.58
	Moderate (49.1-65)	365	68.4%		
	High (65.1-81)	54	10.1%		

Correlation between the Respondents' Psychological Well-being Components and Age

Using Pearson correlation, associations were identified between demographic variables (age) and psychological well-being components (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship, purpose in life, self-acceptance and total psychological well-being). The data displayed significantly positive relationship between age and overall psychological well-being ($r = .11$) in the level of $P = 0.01$, autonomy ($r = .12$) in the level of $P = 0.01$, personal growth ($r = .10$) in the level of $P < 0.05$, purpose in life ($r = .04$) $P < 0.05$. On the other hand, there were no significant correlation between age and environmental mastery ($r = .38$), positive relationship ($r = .09$), and self-acceptance ($r = .09$) among the graduate students (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between Psychological Well-being Components and Age

Dimensions	Age	
	r	Sig
Autonomy	.12	.01
Environmental mastery	-.04	.38
Personal growth	.10	.02
Positive relationship	.07	.09
Purpose in life	.04	.04
Self-acceptance	.07	.09
Overall psychological well-being	.11	.01

DISCUSSION

Respondents' Psychological Well-being levels

In term of the levels of psychological well-being, the respondents were shown to obtain high scores in personal growth, positive relationship with others, and purpose in life, but low scores in self-acceptance, environmental mastery and

autonomy. These results are consistent with the findings of Ryff (1995), who relates Eastern culture to positive relations with others and the Western culture to self-acceptance and autonomy. Likewise, the findings of a study by Daraei (2012) indicated similar results. The crucial factor in generating growth in the wake of adversity may be the perception of the event, itself affected by the individual's personal resources (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), which graduate students are expected to possess. According to Ahrens and Ryff (2006), individuals have a greater experience of effectively managing their lives and surroundings as role occupancy increases. As such, the participants demonstrated more trusting, loving relationships with others and reported a heightened sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, as well as a more positive experience of emotions. Thus, it may be suggested that only well-educated people with multiple roles show higher levels of autonomy.

Correlation between Students' Psychological Well-being Components and Age

The purpose for the present study was to determine whether there was significant correlation between age and psychological well-being components among the graduate students. The finding indicated the following results among the six components of psychological well-being. Significant correlations were found between autonomy and age among the graduate students. This does not accord with the studies by Ryff (1989, 1991), Ryff and Keyes, (1995) and Chen and Persson (2002), who claimed that autonomy is high in middle aged and old people. The research group of this study belongs to collectivism society, and according to the finding of Ryff (1995), autonomy is a character of individualistic cultures. However, Chirkov (2007) indicated that either individualistic or collectivistic practices might be enacted more or less autonomously, demonstrating that autonomy as an attribute of behaviour regulation is different from individualism/collectivism. It can be argued that youths are supposed to show a tendency towards independence. This can imply that autonomy is one part of human potentiality that is used in a specific situation to satisfy and enjoy the life (Chirkov, 2007), regardless of what a society may provide for accomplishing individual goals and values (Diener and Suh, 2000). However, as high personal growth has been indicated in this study, educated people may be aware of their potential to develop their autonomy.

It is important to note that no significant correlation was found between environmental mastery and age among the graduate students in this study. Based on the results of studies by Ryff (1989) and Chen and Persson (2002), older adults would score higher than young adults on environmental mastery. Similarly, a significant correlation was also observed between personal growth and age among the graduate students in this study. As Ryff (1989), Ryff, (1989, 1991), Ryff and Keyes (1995) have confirmed, young adults would score higher than older adults on personal growth. In addition, there was no significant correlation between positive relationship with others and age among the graduate students in this study. In this regard and according to Ryff and Keyes (1995), positive relationship shows age stability. Ryff, Magee, Kling, and Wing (1999)

indicated an age increment with positive relationship with others. According to this view, well-being is not uniform across different periods of life course. Meanwhile, no significant correlation was found among the graduate students in this study in terms of purpose in life and age. This finding is in contrast with that of several researchers such as Ryff (1989), Ryff (1991), Ryff and Keyes (1995), Ryff and Singer (2008) and Chen and Persson (2002). However, there is no exact reason behind this finding; it might be argued that purpose in life represents a powerful source of long-term motivation. It acts like a compass, guiding young people's lives in positive directions (Benson, 2006; Damon, 2008; Damon, Menon, and Bronk, 2003). As a motivator, it orients life goals and daily decisions by directing the use of personal resources such as time, energy, and effort towards pro-social aims. When young people identify a purpose in life and connect that purpose to their academic experience, schoolwork takes on relevance and personal meaningfulness that it may otherwise lack. Researchers such as Damon (2009) argue that purpose in life can serve as an important source of motivation, and graduates lacking it do not fully achieve their intentions, engagements and contributions in academic life particularly and life-span in general. No significant correlation was discovered between self-acceptance and age among the graduate students in this study. This result is in line with the findings of studies by Ryff (1989), Ryff *et al.* (1999), Ryff and Singer (2008), who showed age stability for this dimension. In accordance with the previous findings by Bordbar *et al.* (2010), Ryff (1989, 1991), Walker (2009), Bowman (2010), Clarke *et al.* (2000), Ryff and Keyes (1995), the results of current study also revealed significant and positive correlation between age and overall psychological well-being among the graduate students.

Conclusion

This study showed that there were significant relationship between age and overall psychological well-being, autonomy, personal growth, and purpose in life among graduate students. In addition, in term of the levels of psychological well-being, the respondents were shown high scores in personal growth, positive relationship with others, and purpose in life, while low scores in self-acceptance, environmental mastery and autonomy.

REFERENCES

- Ahrens, C. J. C., and Ryff, C. D. 2006. Multiple roles and well-being: Sociodemographic and psychological moderators. *Sex Roles*, 55(11-12), 801-815.
- Benson, P. L. 2006. All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents. Stanford: Jossey-Bass.
- Birren, J. E., and Renner, V. J. 1980. Concepts and issues of mental health and aging. In J.E. Birren and R. B. Sloane (Eds.), *Handbook of mental health and aging* (pp. 3-33). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Bordbar, F. T., Nikkar, M., Yazdani, F., and Alipoor, A. 2011. Comparing the psychological well-being level of the students of Shiraz Payame Noor University in view of demographic and academic performance variables. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 29, 663-669.

- Bowman, N. A. 2010. The development of psychological well-being among first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(2), 180-200.
- Chen, Y., and Persson, A. 2002. Internet use among young and older adults: Relation to psychological well-being. *Educational Gerontology*, 28(9), 731-744.
- Chirkov, V. I. 2007. Culture, personal autonomy and individualism: Their relationships and implications for personal growth and well-being. *Perspectives and progress in contemporary cross-cultural psychology*, 247-263.
- Clarke, P. J., Marshall, V. W., Ryff, C. D., and Rosenthal, C. J. 2000. Well-being in Canadian seniors: Findings from the Canadian study of health and aging. *Canadian Journal on Aging/La Revue canadienne du vieillissement*, 19(02), 139-159.
- Damon, W. 2008. *The path to purpose: Helping children find their calling in life*. New York: Free Press.
- Damon, W., Menon, J., and Bronk, K. C. 2003. The development of purpose during adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 119-128.
- Diener, E. 2000. Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 34-43.
- Lindfors, P., Berntsson, L., and Lundberg, U. 2006. Factor structure of Ryff's psychological well-being scales in Swedish female and male white-collar workers. *Personality and individual differences*, 40(6), 1213-1222.
- Ryff, C. D. 1989. Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Ryff, C. D. 1991. Possible selves in adulthood and old age: a tale of shifting horizons. *Psychology and aging*, 6(2), 286-295.
- Ryff, C. D. 2008. Challenges and opportunities at the interface of aging, personality, and wellbeing. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins and L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 399-418). New York: Guilford.
- Ryff, C. D., and Keyes, C. L. M. 1995. The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719-727.
- Ryff, C. D., Magee, W. J., Kling, K. C., and Wing, E. H. 1999. Forging Macro-Micro Linkages in the Study of Psychological Well-being. In C. D. Ryff and V. W. Marshall (Eds.), *The self and Society in Aging Processes* (pp. 247-278). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Tedeschi, R. G., and Calhoun, L. G. 2004. " Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence". *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1-18.
- Walker, C. J. 2009. A Longitudinal Study on the Psychological Well-Being of College Students.
