

Does greater richness of experience lead to greater happiness in older adults?

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The happiness during old age years is closely linked to psychosocial factors such as richness of experience. Richness of experience refers to the level of meaning and fulfillment in individuals' lives through various activities and experiences. This research focused on exploring how the richness of experience is related to the happiness in older adults. In addition, the role of various demographic and psychosocial variables in shaping this relationship were examined.

Methods: The study sample consisted of 179 older adults. 64.2% of the participants were female and 35.8% were male. The participants were administered the psychologically rich life questionnaire, and the psychological well-being in the elderly scale as well as a sociodemographic form. Simple Linear Regression was used to analyze the predictive power of richness of experiences, and Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the strength of the relationships between richness of experiences and psychological well-being. Independent Groups t-test and ANOVA were applied to explore if there is a difference on the score based on the sociodemographic differences.

Results: The results of this study indicated a significant positive correlation between a psychologically rich life and psychological well-being in older adults. According to regression analysis, psychologically rich life was found to be a strong predictor of psychological well-being and explained 57% of the variance. Education level and income level were found to significantly affect psychologically rich life and psychological well-being levels such that university graduates and high-income group received the highest scores. Participants without a chronic disease were found to have significantly higher scores on psychological well-being and psychologically rich life. No significant differences were found in terms of other sociodemographic variables such as gender, marital status and having children.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that richness of experiences can be an important factor that improves the quality of life of older adults and the value of diversity of experiences for psychological well-being.

Keywords: Richness of experience, psychological well-being, older adults, psychology of old age

INTRODUCTION

Old age represents an important stage of individuals' lives and psychological well-being is among the factors that determine the overall quality of life of individuals in this period. Research on happiness during old age period¹⁻³ emphasizes the role of life experiences, social interactions and psychological wealth in this process. "Psychological well-being", one of the most well-known eudemonic theories of well-being, is generally represented by positive emotions such as happiness as well as high levels of functioning in individual and social life.⁴ According to the literature, main factors positively contributing to the psychological well-being during old age period can be listed as social participation⁵, psychological resilience⁶, positive perceptions of aging⁷ and quality of life.⁸ In particular, social participation has been found to increase life satisfaction and decrease depression by means of social support.⁹ Resilience positively affects psychological well-being by enabling individuals to stay healthy and cope with

challenges more effectively.¹⁰ For example, it was emphasized that physical health and social support during the pandemic period was associated with less mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression in old age individuals.¹¹ In addition, positive perception of aging and eudaimonic well-being are known to provide a more active aging process by improving quality of life.^{12,13}

In recent years, richness of experience has become a more popular research field considering its effects on individuals' life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Basically, richness of experience refers to the level of having various life experiences which might include social, emotional and cognitive dimensions.¹⁴ It has been reported that individuals living a psychologically rich life are more open to new experiences independent of the pursuit of happiness.¹⁵ Psychological richness can be defined as the sum of total

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experiences providing individuals with a wide range of positive and negative emotions that are intense, surprising, interesting and capable of changing one's perspective.¹⁶ Therefore, these experiences help them to deal with complex mental processes. In older adults, richness of experience plays an important role in reducing psychological problems such as loneliness¹⁷, depression and social isolation.¹⁸ Lee¹⁹ found that social interaction and rich life experiences had a significant effect on the overall happiness of older adults. These findings suggest that richness of experience strengthens not only individual happiness but also social relationships. In addition, studies reveal that an active social life positively affect psychological health of elderly.^{20,21}

Psychological well-being includes elements such as making sense of individuals' lives, emotional intelligence and personal development. In literature, Ryff and Singer²² emphasized that psychological well-being increases individuals' life satisfaction and is strengthened by factors such as social relationships and psychological flexibility. In this context, it can be argued that there is an interaction between richness of experience and psychological richness and this interaction increases the happiness of older individuals. Delle Fave et al.²³ examined the relationship between richness of experience and happiness in their study and found that rich life experiences have positive effects on the emotional well-being of individuals. Similarly, Yang et al.²⁴ found that social interaction and life experiences play an important role in increasing psychological well-being in older individuals. Psychologically rich life is defined as a lifestyle that includes elements of diversity, depth and innovation that enable individuals to experience their lives in a meaningful and satisfying way.²⁵ This concept allows individuals to develop themselves through complex experiences that bring richness and different perspectives to their lives, rather than being limited to the pursuit of happiness and pleasure.²⁶ Psychological well-being is defined as a more general state of well-being that expresses individuals' satisfaction with their lives and the predominance of positive emotional experiences.²⁷ Examining the relationship between these two concepts in depth may contribute to the development of strategies to increase individuals' psychological well-being.

Research on psychological richness in different sociodemographic groups can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this concept. This study aims to understand the relationship between the richness of life and happiness of older individuals and therefore to improve their psychological well-being in the long run. This research is important in terms of providing a better understanding of the factors affecting the happiness of individuals in old age and drawing attention to the importance of richness of experience in this process. Does richness of experience significantly predict the happiness levels of older adults? What is the effect of demographic factors (age, gender, socioeconomic status) on the relationship between richness of experience and happiness? The results of this study may contribute to individuals to live in a happier old age period by enriching their life experiences. In this context, an in-depth examination of the interactions between richness of life experiences and psychological

richness can guide the development of effective strategies to increase the overall happiness level of older adults.

METHODS

Ethics

The study was approved by Üsküdar University Non-interventional Researches Ethics Committee (Date:20.04.2024, Decision No: 61351342/2024-30). All procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical rules and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Purpose of the Research

This research focuses on exploring how the richness of experiences influences happiness in older adults. It seeks to understand the connection between these two factors and examines the role of various demographic and psychosocial variables in shaping this relationship.

Model of the Research

Our research examining the predictive role of richness of experience on happiness level in older adults was designed as a cross-sectional correlational study, in which the degree of relationships between variables are explored at a single time point.²⁸ In the regression analysis, richness of experience was treated as the independent variable and happiness as the dependent variable. The primary aim was to explore the nature of the relationship between these variables and how they are influenced by various demographic factors.

Sample of the Research

A total of 179 older adults aged between 65 and 85 years were included in the study. The mean age of participants was 70.94±4.77. Female participants comprised 64.2% of the sample. The sample size was determined based on Cohen's (1988) statistical power analysis.²⁹ Simple random sampling was used to collect the data. Any history of a neuropsychiatric disorder was set as exclusion criteria. An informed consent was taken from all participants before data collection.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection process utilized the "sociodemographic information form," the "psychologically rich life questionnaire," and the "psychological well-being scale in the elderly." These tools were designed to assess participants' demographic characteristics, levels of life richness, and psychological well-being. Completing the questions took approximately 30 minutes per participant. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with necessary explanations provided to ensure the accuracy and reliability of responses. Details of the data collection instruments are summarized below.

Sociodemographic Information Form: This form was prepared by the researcher to collect sociodemographic information about the participants including age, marital status, gender, education level as well as the employment status and chronic disease status.

Psychologically Rich Life Questionnaire: Developed by Oishi et al. (2019) and adapted into Turkish by Aşar (2021), this

scale measures how psychologically rich individuals perceive their lives. It consists of 11 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scale is unidimensional, with no reverse-coded items, and higher scores indicate greater psychological richness. The Turkish version demonstrates high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .93.

Psychological Well-Being Scale in the Elderly: Created by Gümüş Demir (2022), this scale assesses psychological well-being in elderly individuals. It consists of 15 items on a single factor, addressing aspects of satisfaction with social relationships, self-worth, meaning in life, and positive emotions. Responses are rated on a 5-point likert scale from "1: strongly disagree" to "5: strongly agree," with higher scores indicating better psychological well-being. The scale has strong reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .91.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS 27 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Independent Groups t-test and ANOVA were employed to analyze mean differences based on demographic variables. Post hoc tests were performed for pairwise comparisons. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of relationships between variables. Simple Linear Regression analysis was used to assess the predictive power of the independent variable. All tests were conducted with a 95% confidence interval, and the significance level was set at p<.05.

RESULTS

The reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, and all coefficients were found to be above 0.70, indicating that the scales are reliable.³³ Additionally, the suitability of the scales for normal distribution was examined, and the kurtosis and skewness coefficients were determined to fall within the range of ±1. This finding confirms that the scales satisfy the assumption of normal distribution (Table 1).³⁴

Descriptive analyses showed that 64.2% of the participants are female, 35.8% are male, 55.9% are married, 11.2% are single and 33.0% are widowed, 85.5% have children while 14.5% do not have children, 26.8% are primary school graduates, 24.6% are middle school graduates, 31.3% are high school graduates and 17.3% are university graduates. When the participants were analyzed in terms of employment status, it was observed that 19.6% were working and 80.4% were not working. When income levels were analyzed, 46.9% had low income (when income is less than expenses), 36.3% had medium income (when income is equal to expenses), 16.8% had high income (when income is more than expenses), and finally 63.7% had

low income. The participants had a mean age of 70.94 years (SD=4.77), with ages ranging from 65 to 85 years (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of demographic information of participants

		n	%
Gender	Woman	115	64.2
	Male	64	35.8
Marital status	Married	100	55.9
	Single	20	11.2
	His wife is dead	59	33.0
Child status	Yes	153	85.5
	No	26	14.5
Education status	Primary school	48	26.8
	Middle school	44	24.6
	High school	56	31.3
	University	31	17.3
Employment status	Working	35	19.6
	Not working	144	80.4
Income status	Low (Income less than expenditure)	84	46.9
	Medium (income and expenditure equal)	65	36.3
	High (Income more than expenditure)	30	16.8
Chronic disease status	Yes	114	63.7
	No	65	36.3
	Total	179	100.0

The correlation analysis revealed that a significant and strong positive correlation was present between psychologically rich life and psychological well-being in the elderly (r=.75, p<.01) (Table 3). However, no significant relationship between age and psychologically rich life (r=0.01, p>.05) and between age and psychological well-being was found (r=-0.13, p>.05).

Table 3. Relationship between age, psychologically rich life, psychological well-being in the elderly variables

	1	2	3
1-Age	1		
2-Psychologically rich life questionnaire	.01	1	
3- Psychological well-being scale in the elderly	-.13	.75**	1

**p<0.01, *p<0.05 Name of the applied test: Pearson correlation test

The regression analysis indicated that a psychologically rich life is a significant predictor of psychological well-being (B=0.67, SE=0.04, β=0.75, t(777)=15.26, p<.001). The variable "psychologically rich life" accounted for 57% of the variance in psychological well-being (R=.75, R²=.57), and the regression model was statistically significant (F(,777)=232.77, p<.001) (Table 4).

Table 1. Findings related to the examination of descriptive statistics and kurtosis, skewness, Cronbach alpha coefficients of the psychologically rich life questionnaire, psychological well-being scale in the elderly

	n	Min	Max	\bar{X}	SD	Flatte ned.	Distort ed	(α)
Psychologically rich life questionnaire	179	13	69	42.00	14.65	-0.95	-0.18	0.95
Psychological well-being scale in the elderly	179	15	67	41.39	12.94	-0.82	-0.12	0.96

Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum, SD: Standard deviation

Table 4. Findings related to the prediction of psychological rich life on psychological well-being

	B	SH	β	t	p	Lower limit	Upper limit
Psychologically rich life	0.67	0.04	0.75	15.26	<.001***	0.58	0.75
R=.75 R ² =.57 F(1,777) =232.77 p<.001***							
***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05; Note, CI: Confidence interval							

The analysis revealed a significant difference in psychologically rich life questionnaire scores between individuals with chronic diseases (\bar{X} =40.04, SD=14.83) and those without chronic diseases (\bar{X} =45.45, SD=13.75) (t(177)=-2.41, p=.017). It was found that there was a significant difference between the group with chronic disease (\bar{X} =39.74, SD=12.98) and the group without chronic disease (\bar{X} =44.28, SD=12.46) in terms of psychological well-being scale scores (t(177)=-2.28, p=.024) (Table 5).

The analysis showed a significant difference among income groups in psychologically rich life questionnaire scores (F(2, 176)=10.28, p<.001). According to the Tukey test, it was concluded that the psychologically rich life levels of the low income group (\bar{X} =37.21, SD=14.12) were significantly lower than the middle income group (\bar{X} =44.89, SD=13.75) and the high income group (\bar{X} =49.13, SD=13.82).

A significant difference was found among income status groups regarding psychological well-being scale scores (F(2, 176)=20.49, p<.001). According to the Tukey test, it was concluded that the psychological well-being levels of the low income group (\bar{X} =35.43, SD=11.76) were significantly lower than the middle income group (\bar{X} =46.37, SD=11.43) and the high income group (\bar{X} =47.27, SD=12.24) (Table 6).

The results revealed a significant difference among educational status groups on the psychologically rich life questionnaire (F(3, 175)=9.10, p<.001). According to Tukey test, it was concluded that primary school graduates (\bar{X} =34.35, SD=14.06) had significantly lower levels of psychologically rich life than secondary school graduates (\bar{X} =44.59, SD=13.45), high school

graduates (\bar{X} =42.02, SD=14.84) and university graduates (\bar{X} =50.13, SD=11.35).

A significant difference was observed in the psychological well-being scale scores for the elderly in terms of the educational status (F(3, 175)=6.28, p<.001). According to the Games-Howell test, it was found that primary school graduates (\bar{X} =36.35, SD=10.47) had lower levels of psychological well-being than secondary school graduates (\bar{X} =43.59, SD=12.64) and university graduates (\bar{X} =48.10, SD=10.45). It was also found that high school graduates (\bar{X} =34.35, SD=14.06) had significantly lower levels of psychological rich life than university graduates (\bar{X} =50.13, SD=11.35) (Table 7).

DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between psychologically rich life and psychological well-being of older adults. The results revealed that a psychologically rich life is a significant predictor of psychological well-being. A psychologically rich life is defined as the extent to which individuals experience diverse, meaningful, and profound life events.³⁵ Our findings are in line with the previous literature suggesting that a psychologically rich life increases happiness and overall life satisfaction.³⁶⁻³⁸

Additional analyses were conducted to understand whether sociodemographic factors (such as education level, income level) modulate this relationship. It was found that the effect of psychological richness was more pronounced especially in high education and high-income groups. Health status was also found to have an impact on psychological well-being; such that individuals with chronic diseases were found to have lower levels of psychological well-being. In general, our

Table 5. Comparison of psychologically rich life questionnaire and psychological well-being scale scores in the elderly according to chronic disease status

Group with chronic disease (n=114)	Group without chronic disease (n=65)				t	Sd.	p
	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS			
Psychologically rich life questionnaire	40.04	14.83	45.45	13.75	2.41	177	0.017*
Psychological well-being scale in the elderly	39.74	12.98	44.28	12.46	2.28	177	0.024*
***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05 Test Used: Independent Samples T-Test, Sd: Standard deviation							

Table 6. Comparison of psychologically rich life questionnaire and psychological well-being scale scores in the elderly according to income status

Dependent variables	Income Status						F(2,176)	p	Post-Hoc
	Low (Income less than expenditure) ¹ (n=84)		Medium (income and expenditure equal) ² (n=65)		High (Income more than expenditure) ³ (n=30)				
	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS			
Psychologically rich life questionnaire	37.21	14.12	44.89	13.75	49.13	13.82	10.28	<.001***	3.2>1
Psychological well-being	35.43	11.76	46.37	11.43	47.27	12.24	20.49	<.001***	3.2>1
Scale in the elderly	3		3					*	
***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05 Test Used: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)									

Table 7. Comparison of psychologically rich life questionnaire and psychological well-being scale scores in the elderly according to educational status

Dependent variables	Education status								F(3,175)	p	Post- Hoc
	Primary school ¹ (n=48)		Secondary school ² (n=44)		High school ³ (n=56)		University ⁴ (n=31)				
	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS	\bar{X}	SS			
Psychologically rich life questionnaire	34.3	14.0	44.5	13.4	42.0	14.8	50.1	11.3	9.10	<.001**	4,3,2>1
	5	6	9	5	2	4	3	5		*	4>3
Psychological well-being	36.3	10.4	43.5	12.6	40.2	14.5	48.1	10.4	6.28	<.001**	4,2>1
Scale in the elderly	5	7	9	4	5	4	0	5		*	4>3

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05 Test Used: One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

findings support the existing literature where plenty of studies indicate psychological well-being is associated to various biopsychosocial factors. Diener and Ryan²⁷ for instance, emphasized that socially rich experiences positively influence individuals' happiness levels. Similarly, the findings of Manav and colleagues²⁸ demonstrated that a psychologically rich life significantly enhances the psychological well-being of older adults.

It was found that the relationship between psychological rich life and psychological well-being was more pronounced especially in university graduates and higher income groups. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that economic and educational advantages may support individuals' psychological well-being.^{39,40} The significantly higher psychological well-being in individuals with higher income indicate that economic security supports the general happiness and well-being. In the study, while no significant differences were observed regarding factors such as having children or employment status, individuals with chronic diseases showed significantly lower levels of psychological well-being and psychologically rich life compared to those without chronic diseases. This finding shows that health status is a determinant factor of psychological well-being in older adults. There are many studies supporting the findings⁴¹⁻⁴³, which points to the importance of a holistic health approach in old age.

This study reveals that psychologically rich life is an important factor supporting psychological well-being in elderly individuals and emphasizes the importance of practices that encourage such experiences. In literature, positive psychology interaction group program positively impacted the levels of hope and anger among the older adults.⁴⁴ Similarly, art therapy program resulted in increased positive emotions and self-compassion levels in older adults.⁴⁵ Therefore, in order to support the psychological well-being levels of older adults, it is important to develop programs that promote a psychologically rich life. Encouraging social activities and group programs for elderly individuals may help to enrich their social connections and life experiences.

Limitations

First of all, the cross-sectional design of the study restricts the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Therefore, longitudinal studies are recommended for future research, which could provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of living a psychologically rich life. The lack of demographic diversity of participants might be listed as another limitation.

Most of the participants of this study were university graduates and had moderate economic income that may limit the generalizability of the findings.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the role of living a psychologically rich life on psychological well-being in older adults. Our findings suggest that being rich in psychological experiences has a positive impact on happiness and overall life satisfaction. Higher education and higher income levels were found to strengthen this relationship and enhance psychological well-being. Additionally, participants without chronic illnesses exhibited higher levels of psychological well-being. Overall, these findings suggest that encouraging social activities and expanding group programs can be beneficial for old age individuals. Developing tailored programs to increase psychologically rich experiences, particularly for individuals with lower education and lower income, may be helpful to increase the overall happiness level of society. Adopting a holistic health approach could help mitigate the adverse effects of chronic illnesses on well-being. Future research could include longitudinal studies to explore the long-term benefits of a psychologically rich life. Policymakers may also consider integrating positive psychology-based interventions into health strategies to address the needs of various socioeconomic groups and enhance happiness in older populations.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethics Committee Approval

The study was approved by Üsküdar University Non-interventional Researches Ethics Committee (Date:20.04.2024, Decision No: 61351342/2024-30).

Informed Consent

All patients signed and free and informed consent form.

Referee Evaluation Process

Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions

All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

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