

An Analysis of the Factors that Affect the Life Satisfaction of Elderly Turks Living in Australia

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the opinions of people who were older than 60, born in Turkey and living in Australia, about returning to Turkey permanently, the number of years they had lived abroad, how often they travel to Turkey and the influence of these factors on their life satisfaction. The dependent variable of this study was the Life Satisfaction Scale created by Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin (1961). The scale's validity and reliability analyses in Turkey were done by Camur Karatas. The study results indicate that a majority of the participants were females between 60 and 69 years of age, and 77.3% of them had been living in Sydney for 30 to 39 years. Of the participants, 44.5% traveled to Turkey once every two or three years and 31.8% traveled to Turkey once every four or five years. Of the participants, 19.1% considered returning to live to Turkey permanently. The hierarchical regression analysis results revealed that income and education levels had the greatest influence on females' life satisfaction, while age, education, and income levels had the greatest influence on males' life satisfaction. It was found that females' life satisfaction decreased as the frequency of their visits to Turkey and the length of their residence in Sydney increased. Males' life satisfaction decreased as the frequency of their visits to Turkey decreased.

Keywords: life satisfaction, elderly, elderly Turks, geriatrics, life scale.

Introduction

Life satisfaction is a person's ability to evaluate positively all the factors that determine their quality of life such as family, school and friends in light of their self-determined criteria (Diener et al., 1985; Diener, 1994; Veenhoven, 1995).

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In other words, it is a person's awareness of the extent to which they like their life as a whole (Headey & Wearing, 1992; Veenhoven, 1995; Lapa, 2013). It reflects their general feelings about life and is accepted as a measure of emotional happiness (Veenhoven, 1995).

Life satisfaction is one of the most important factors that affects people's mental health and social relationships. Life satisfaction means being satisfied with one's entire life rather than satisfaction with a specific situation. It includes psychological wellness, happiness, motivation, the maintenance of social relationships and aging in a healthy way (Neugarten, Havighurst & Tobin, 1961; Onur, 1997). For life satisfaction, it is important that people feel valuable and never think of themselves as being useless. Leisure activities are particularly influential in eliminating elderly people's much stronger feelings of uselessness. When people attend leisure activities that make them happy, they lose the feeling of uselessness and cope with the difficulties in their life more easily, which increases their life satisfaction (West et al., 1996; Raymore & Scott, 1998).

Dupuis and Smale (1995) found that having hobbies and visiting friends has a positive correlation with elderly people's psychological well-being and a negative correlation with depression. The way that we spend our spare time is as important as the people with whom we spend our free time for our psychological well-being. Accordingly, a study by Palinkas, Wingard, and Barrett-Connor (1990) showed that an increase in social relationships usually increased well-being, too. Similarly, a study by Larson (1990) proved that people are happier when they spend time with their friends, and Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) determined that building social relationships during leisure activities generally improved friendships and cooperation. These results indicate that social networks provide a social support system for people, and this system functions as a buffer in coping with the stress of daily life.

Life satisfaction is important for all age groups. However, it is more often highlighted for elderly people. This is because people do not participate in active production and lose their roles and status in old age (Demirdis, 2013). The amount and quality of elderly people's relationships with their spouses, adult children, grandchildren, relatives, neighbors, and friends, the support these relationships provide and mental health are very important for life satisfaction. It is important for life satisfaction whether elderly people live near or far from their families, relatives, and friends.

The last thirty years' studies conducted of the factors that affect people's well-being or life satisfaction show that life satisfaction is a multi-dimensional concept and related to many factors. Some studies in the relevant literature are particularly important. These are the studies that analyze the amount and quality of elderly people's social relationships with their spouses, adult children, grandchildren, relatives, neighbors and friends, the support provided by this network and their effect on the psychological health of elderly people (Fong, 2001). The importance of these studies is due to the fact that friends and family, the most important elements of the social network, provide both emotional (e.g., understanding, love and identity) and instrumental (e.g., money, goods, information and satisfying needs) support (Siu & Phillips, 2002).

Studies of the relationship between elderly people and their adult children are motivated by the important effect of these relationships on elderly people's lives. These studies have focused on the frequency of their contact with their adult children and its effect on the psychological well-being of the parents. Although some studies have found that quantitative measurements such as the frequency of visits influences elderly people's life satisfaction (Arens, 1982; Tate, 1982), most studies have found a very weak relationship between elderly people's well-being and the frequency of their contact with their children (DeBurger, 1977; Lee & Ellithorpe, 1982; Lee & Ishii-Kuntz, 1987; Gitmez, 2000).

Elderly people's relationship with their siblings is as important their relationships with their children. The similarity between siblings' family values and perspectives on life helps them understand each other and the world, too. When siblings are close in age, they can provide emotional support to each other about issues caused by old age such as reduced physical power (Cicirelli, 1977). Cumming and Schnider (1961) say that the bonds between siblings are powerful or weak depending on personal choices, sibling relationships are closer to friendship than parent-child relationships, and that siblings are the greatest emotional and social support during the final stage of people's lives. Some studies indicated that elderly people's relationships with each other have a positive influence on their psychological well-being (Ishii-Kuntz, 1990), while most studies show that this relationship has either a very slight effect or no effect on elderly people's motivation (DeBurger, 1977; Lee & Ihinger-Tallman, 1980; McGhee, 1985).

For instance, contrary to expectations, a study by Lee and Ihinger-Tallman (1980) found that relationships between siblings had no effect on males' and females' motivation no matter how frequent contact was. Although siblings are considered to be important supporters in social and emotional terms, a study by McGhee (1985) found that a close relationship between siblings had no effect on motivation and life satisfaction. These studies may not have found any effects of elderly people's sibling relationships on their psychological well-being because they analyzed these relationships only by quantitative variables such as frequency of contact and disregarded the quality of these relationships.

There have been many extensive studies on elderly people's life satisfaction and connections with social network particularly in developed countries. There is an increase in the number of studies in Turkey on old age and retirement, and these studies analyze the subject from different viewpoints. However, Turkey, a developing country, has major problems in meeting the basic needs of elderly people such as health, housing, and income, and the relevant studies mainly focus on these issues. Thus, there are few studies examining how elderly people's relationships with their social networks affect their life satisfaction.

In Turkey, it is a more acceptable for elderly people to be taken care of by their families and social environment, which highlights the importance of elderly people's relationships with their social network. For this reason, elderly people's relationships with their support networks should be examined to increase their life satisfaction by meeting their needs and to help them to live independently in society with a high quality of life. This will also contribute to the policies and practices to be created or revised for elderly people.

The rapid increase and spreading of globalization have increased people's inclination to immigrate to other parts of the world. Some countries offer employment to citizens of other countries, making this inclination to immigrate even stronger (Tufan, 1987). For instance, after the immigration agreement signed by Australia and Turkey in 1967, many Asian immigrants settled in Australia for the first time. According to data from The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2006), 30,490 people who were born in Turkey were living in Australia in 2006, and 9.5% of them were 65 years of age or older. The 2011 data indicate that the rate of those who were at 65 years of age and older was 12.9%, and it was estimated that this rate would increase. Thus, the number of Turkish elderly people in Australia is increasing.

For this reason, it is important that researchers examine these elderly people's relationships with their support networks and the life satisfaction of elderly people who maintain relationships with their relatives and friends in Turkey. Elderly people's length of residence abroad, the frequency of their visits to Turkey and their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey are important criteria. For this reason, this study was planned and conducted to examine the length of residence abroad, the frequency of their visits to Turkey and their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey of elderly people 60 years of age or older who live in Australia and the effect of these factors on their life satisfaction.

Methodology

Study Sample

This study was conducted with 110 participants of 60 years of age or older who were at the Turkish Welfare Association in New South Wales, Sydney when the researchers went there. They participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The study data were collected during interviews with the participants. Of the participants, 63.6% were females (n=70) and 36.4% were males (n=40). Of the participants, 85.5% (n=94) were between the ages 60 and 69, and 14.5% (n=16) were between the ages 70 and 79. The average age of the participants was 65.07 (± 5.746). Of the participants, 81.8% (n=90) were married, 18.2% (n=20) were either widows, widowers or divorced, 41.8% (n=46) had elementary school educations or less, 37.3% (n=41) had high school diplomas and 20.9% (n=23) had university degrees. The participants indicated that 1.8% (n=2) had low incomes, 61.8% (n=68) had moderate incomes and 36.4% (n=40) had high incomes. More than half of the participants included in the study (68.2%) (n=75) reported that their health was moderately good, 30% (n=33) said that their health was good. Very few said that their health was bad (1.8%) (n=2), and this was combined with the other two responses to be able to do the significance analyses.

Of the participants, 10.9% said that they had been living in Sydney for 20 to 29 years, 77.3% had been living there for 30 to 39 years, and 11.8% had been living there for 40 to 49 years. Thus, the average length of their residence in Sydney was 34.77 years (± 4.703). Of them, 18.2% (n=20) visited Turkey once a year, 44.5% (n=49) visited Turkey once every two or three years, and 31.8% (n=35) visited Turkey once every four or five years.

Only 5.5% (n=6) visited Turkey once every six years or less often. Finally, 19.1% (n=21) of the participants were considered a permanent return to Turkey.

Measurements

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of the study was the Life Satisfaction Scale created by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1961). Camur Karatas did the validity and reliability analysis of the scale in Turkey. The scale includes 20 items that measure participants' levels of satisfaction with their past and present lives as well as their perceptions of the future and expectations from it. Of these items, 13 are positive and 7 are negative. The participants were asked to respond, "I agree," "I do not agree" or "I am indecisive" for each of the items on the scale.

The participants agreed with positive statements and disagreed with negative statements were given 1 point. Other responses were given no points. This was used to calculate their life satisfaction scores. The participants' life satisfaction scores ranged between 0 and 20. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction with life. The Cronbach's α reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.853. The validity and reliability coefficients of the original scale were 0.57 and 0.79 (Neugarten, Havighurst & Tobin, 1961), respectively. The validity and reliability coefficients of the study by Camur Karatas (1988) were 0.82 and 0.93, respectively. The other dependent variable of the scale was information about the frequency of the participants' visits to Turkey and their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey. This information was collected using a survey form created by the authors. The information about their visits to Turkey was classified in four groups: a visit every year, every two or three years, once in four or five years and once in six years or less often. The information about their considerations of returning to live in Turkey permanently was classified as yes and no.

Independent Variable

The independent variables of the study were the demographic information of the study sample and the participants' years of residence in Sydney. The demographic information included the participants' age, gender, marital status, education level, and their opinions of their own income levels and health. Their ages were classified in two groups: 60 to 69 and 70 to 79.

Their marital status was either married, widow, widower or divorced. Their education levels were classified in three groups: elementary school or less, high school diploma or less and university educated. Their opinions of their income levels were classified in three groups which were low, moderate, and high. Finally, their opinions of their health were classified as poor, moderately good and good. The duration of the participants' residence in Sydney was classified in three groups: 20-29 years, 30-39 years, and 40-49 years.

Data Analysis

The study data were analyzed using hierarchical regression analysis. In hierarchical regression, the order that independent variables are analyzed is important. In hierarchical regression analysis, the first model analyzed the influence of participants' demographic information and years of living in Sydney on their life satisfaction. The second model added the frequency of their visits to Turkey to the other two, and the third model added their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey. The authors calculated the values in the hierarchical regression analysis separately for male and female participants. For the selection of the variables, the authors chose the enter method. The interpretation of the analysis results was based on regression coefficients, *F* values and coefficients of determination.

The Factors That Affect Life Satisfaction

Table 1 shows the hierarchical regression analysis results for Turks aged 60 and older living in Australia, the frequency of their visits to Turkey, their considerations of a permanent return to Turkey and how these factors affect their life satisfaction.

The first model included the demographic information and the duration of the participants' residence in Sydney. It was created to determine the variables that influence females' life satisfaction was not statistically significant ($F=2.252$, $p \geq 0.05$). According to this model, the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were education level ($\beta=0.22$) and income level ($\beta=0.18$), respectively. The weakest determinants of life satisfaction were the years of living in Sydney ($\beta=-0.06$), marital status ($\beta=.08$), age ($\beta=0.09$) and health ($\beta=.09$).

The second model added information about the frequency of the female participants' visits to Turkey and was statistically significant ($F=2.566$, $p<0.05$). According to this model, the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were the frequency of their visits to Turkey ($\beta=-0.25$), education level ($\beta=0.14$) and income level ($\beta=0.13$), respectively. The weakest determinants of life satisfaction were age ($\beta=0.05$), health ($\beta=0.06$), years of living in Sydney ($\beta=-0.06$) and marital status ($\beta=0.09$).

The third model was added information about the female participants' consideration of a permanent return to Turkey. This model was also statistically significant ($F=2.573$, $p<0.05$). According to this model, the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were the frequency of their visits to Turkey ($\beta=-0.26$), consideration of a permanent return to Turkey ($\beta=0.18$), income level ($\beta=0.12$), education level ($\beta=0.11$) and years of living in Sydney ($\beta=-0.10$), respectively. The weakest determinants of life satisfaction were health ($\beta=0.04$), age ($\beta=0.06$) and marital status ($\beta=0.07$).

In the second model, the frequency of the female participants' visits to Turkey made a strong negative contribution to the equation of regression. In the third model, both the frequency of their visits to Turkey and years of living in Sydney made a strong negative contribution to the equation of regression.

A combined analysis of the three models created to determine the variables which influenced female participants' life satisfaction revealed that the coefficients of the frequency of their visits to Turkey were statistically significant in the second and third models. However, the coefficients of their years of living in Sydney and consideration of a permanent return to live in Turkey were not statistically significant. In addition, the demographic variables and years of living in Sydney (explanation percentage: 17.7%), frequency of their visits to Turkey (explanation percentage: 22.5%) and consideration of a permanent return to Turkey (explanation percentage: 25.2%) collectively explained 15.4% of the dependent variable.

The first model included demographic information and years of living in Sydney and was created to determine the variables that influenced male participants' life satisfaction. It was statistically significant ($F=6.310$, $p<0.05$). According to this model, the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were age ($\beta=0.42$), education level ($\beta=0.31$), income level ($\beta=0.30$) and health ($\beta=0.23$), respectively.

The weakest determinants of life satisfaction were years of living in Sydney ($\beta=0.04$) and marital status ($\beta=-0.07$), respectively. The second model added information about the frequency of males' visits to Turkey. It was also statistically significant ($F=6.387$, $p<.05$). According to this model, the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were age ($\beta=0.37$), income level ($\beta=0.30$), the frequency of their visits to Turkey ($\beta=-0.27$), health ($\beta=0.20$) and education level ($\beta=.18$), respectively. The weakest determinants of life were respectively the years of living in Sydney ($\beta=-0.01$) and marital status ($\beta=-0.07$).

The third model added information about males' consideration of a permanent return to Turkey was also statistically significant ($F=5.605$, $p<.05$). This model indicated that the strongest determinants of life satisfaction were age ($\beta=0.36$), income level ($\beta=0.28$), the frequency of their visits to Turkey ($\beta=-0.27$), health ($\beta=0.22$), education level ($\beta=0.20$) and their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey ($\beta=0.10$), respectively. The weakest determinants of life satisfaction were their years of living in Sydney ($\beta=-.04$) and marital status ($\beta=-0.06$), respectively. In the second and third models, males' frequencies of traveling to Turkey caused a strong and negative effect on the equation of regression.

A combined evaluation of the three models designed with the purpose of determining the variables that affected males' life satisfaction revealed that the coefficients of the age variable were statistically significant in all three models. However, the coefficients of the males' years of living in Sydney, the frequency of their visits to Turkey and consideration of a permanent return to Turkey were not statistically significant. In addition, the demographic variables and their years of living in Sydney (explanation percentage: 53.4%), the frequency of their visits to Turkey (explanation percentage: 58.3%) and consideration of a permanent return to Turkey (explanation percentage: 59.1%) collectively explained 49% of the dependent variable.

Table 1: Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis of the Factors That Influence Life Satisfaction

		Female						Male							
Independent Variables	B	SD	β	F	R	AR ²	P	B	SD	β	F	R	AR ²	P	
Model 1	(Constant)	1.79	8.40					-	10.49						
	Age	.71	.09	.09				26.58	.11	.42**					
	Marital Status	.42	.67	.08				.36	1.12	-.07					
	Education Level	1.31	.80	.22	2.252	.42	.10	.050	-.62	.99	.31	6.310**	.73	.45	.000**
	Income Level	1.54	1.18	.18				1.86	1.56	.30					
	Health	.84	1.20	.09				2.74	1.53	.23					
	Years of Living in Sydney	-.05	.11	-.06				2.17	.17	.04					
Model 2	(Constant)							-							
	Age	9.06	9.01	.05				15.88	11.51						
	Marital Status	.04	.09	.09				.32	.11	.37**					
	Education Level	.45	.66	.14				-.58	1.08	-.07					
	Income Level	.83	.82	.13	2.566*	.47	.14	.022*	1.06	1.04	.18	6.387**	.76	.49	.000**
	Health	1.11	1.17	.06				2.68	1.50	.30					
	Years of Living in Sydney	.57	1.18	-.06				1.88	1.48	.20					
Frequency of Visits to Turkey	-.63	.32	-.25*				-.02	.17	-.01						
Model 3	(Constant)							-							
	Age	6.19	9.12	.06				16.90	11.64						
	Marital Status	.05	.09	.07				.32	.11	.36**					
	Education Level	.37	.65	.11				-.49	1.09	-.06					
	Income Level	.66	.82	.12				1.18	1.05	.20					
	Health	1.08	1.16	.04				2.54	1.52	.28					
	Years of Living in Sydney	.34	1.18	-.10	2.573*	.50	.15	.017*	2.10	1.51	.22	5.605**	.77	.49	.000**
	Frequency of Visits to Turkey	-.65	.32	-.26*				-.05	.17	-.04					
Consideration of a Permanent Return to Turkey	2.34	1.56	.18				1.02	1.28	.10						

*P<.05 **P<.01

Discussion and Conclusion

This study found that income and education levels had the strongest influence on elderly women's life satisfaction, while age, education level, and income level had the strongest influence on elderly males' life satisfaction. Studies of the factors that influence life satisfaction show that there are many variables that affect life satisfaction. Of these variables, health is the strongest determinant of elderly people's life satisfaction (Speritzer, Snyder & Larson, 1979; Chi & Lee, 1989; Lee & Chi, 1990; Ho et al., 1995; Bowling & Grundy, 1997; Unger et al., 1999). Sener et al. (2008) conducted a study in Turkey that analyzed the effects of socio-economic and demographic variables on elderly people's life satisfaction. This study found that health and education level were the strongest determinants of female' life satisfaction, while health alone was the strongest determinant of males' life satisfaction. Studies of the factors related to life satisfaction have found that mainly demographic variables were the determinants of life satisfaction (McGhee, 1985; De Jong-Giervelt, 1989; Rice, 1989; Thanh, 1992; Lee & Ellithorpe, 1982).

Lawton, Klean, and DeCarlo (1984) and Gitmez (2000) say that income level, the most important determinant of socio-economic status, is an important determinant of life satisfaction. Other studies of this issue also show that income level has a direct and important influence on life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Cutler, 1992).

A collective analysis of the three models that were created to determine the variables that directly affected females' life satisfaction revealed that the coefficients of the frequency of their visits to Turkey were statistically significant in the second and third models. On the other hand, the coefficients of females' years of living in Sydney and their consideration of a permanent return to Turkey were not statistically significant. In the second model, the frequency of females' visits to Turkey had a strong negative influence on the equation of regression. Both the frequency of their visits to Turkey and their years of living in Sydney had a strong negative effect on this equation in the third model. In other words, life satisfaction decreased as the frequency of their visits to Turkey and years of living in Sydney increased. This indicates that elderly persons are under the influence of their adult children, relatives and friends, and they Miss Sydney when they are in Turkey and Miss Turkey when they are in Sydney.

A collective analysis of the three models that were designed to determine the variables that influenced males' life satisfaction revealed that the coefficients of the age variable were statistically significant in all three models, while the coefficients of the males' years of living in Sydney, the frequency of their visits to Turkey and consideration of a permanent return to Turkey permanently was not statistically significant. In the second and third models, the frequency of males' visits to Turkey caused a strong negative effect on the equation of regression. Their life satisfaction decreased as the frequency of their visits to Turkey increased, which may be the result of missing Sydney when they come to Turkey.

To conclude, the limitations of this study were the authors held interview only with 110 elderly persons who lived in the suburb of Auburn in Sydney and regularly came to the Turkish Welfare Association, and the interviews did not include any questions that inquired about the quality of their visits to Turkey and their relationships in Turkey. However, it is remarkable that the frequency of both the male and female participants' visits to Turkey had a strong negative influence on their life satisfaction. For this reason, this study is important because it contributes to the determination of strategies to arrange the relationships with relatives in Turkey to increase the life satisfaction of elderly Turks in Sydney. In addition, the determination of the family relationships and friendships of elderly Turks living in Australia and planning studies of the quality of these relationships will contribute to the social support that will increase elderly people's quality of life.

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