



## A Study on Life Satisfaction of Elderly People

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### Abstract

Life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of one's life as a whole. This study was carried out among a randomly selected sample of 100 elderly people in the age group of age 60 to 79 years in Kozhikode District of Kerala, India using a questionnaire containing the measure of life satisfaction and various characteristics of the respondents. 60% of respondents have high life satisfaction, while 40% have low to medium life satisfaction. The characteristics of the respondents together explain 53% of the variation observed in their life satisfaction. Among them, significant predictors include age, difficulty in activities of daily living, and difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living. It was observed that comparatively older individuals are less likely to have low life satisfaction, difficulty in activities of daily living contributes to lower life satisfaction, and difficulty in carrying out instrumental activities of daily living also leads to lower life satisfaction. High life satisfaction scores exist for comparatively more respondents in the upper age group of 70 to 79 years, for those who report no difficulty in activities of daily living, and for those who have no difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living. Other factors, which may be contributing to more life satisfaction, have also been mentioned in the article. Conducting studies on different psychological aspects of elderly people would be useful to understand the factors affecting their life so that suitable strategies such as counselling, practice of relaxation techniques etc. can be formulated for improving their physical and psychological wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Life Satisfaction; Elderly People; Kerala; Wellbeing

### Introduction

Even though the term life satisfaction is sometimes used interchangeably with happiness, they are actually two separate concepts. Life satisfaction is more stable and long-lived than happiness. Life satisfaction is the evaluation of one's life as a whole and not simply one's current level of happiness. Life satisfaction is an overall assessment of

feelings and attitudes about one's life at a particular point in time ranging from negative to positive [1]. Life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads [2]. The underlying idea about life satisfaction is that it refers to an individual's overall feelings about life and how pleased he or she is with how it is going on.

There are many factors that contribute to life satisfaction, including work, romantic relationships, relationships with family and friends, personal development, health and wellness etc. Life satisfaction measures are generally subjective or based on the factors that an individual finds personally important in their own life. There are two main types of theories about life satisfaction, namely, Bottom-up theories which consider life satisfaction as a result of satisfaction in the many domains of life, and Top-down theories, which considers life satisfaction as an influencer of domain-specific satisfaction [2]. Bottom-up theories hold that we experience satisfaction in many domains of life, like work, relationships, family and friends, personal development, and health and fitness. Our satisfaction with our lives in these areas combines to create our overall life satisfaction. On the other hand, top-down theories state that our overall life satisfaction influences or even determines our life satisfaction in the many different domains. Hence, overall life satisfaction and satisfaction in the multiple domains of life are closely related.

To cope up with global aging, WHO has proposed a Decade of Healthy Aging 2020–2030 to promote the health of more than a billion people aged 60 and more [3]. Life satisfaction and physical activity are two important aspects of healthy aging [4]. Significant differences between elderly people in the physical and cognitive state can be seen [5], causing physical and cognitive problems. The life satisfaction of the elderly has been analysed based on some studies [6]. The main factors influencing the life satisfaction of elders are health status, economic level, social support, mode of pension, social security, and support got from people from other generations. Increase in age contributes to more life satisfaction and happiness [7].

## Methodology

The study was carried out among a randomly selected sample of 100 elderly people in the age group of age 60 to 79 years in Kozhikode District of Kerala, India using a questionnaire, which contained the measure of Life Satisfaction, and the characteristics of the respondents, namely, age, sex, education,

present job, importance of religion, satisfaction in living arrangements, whether a victim of ill treatment by others, whether a victim of discrimination by others, membership in organization/s as an indicator of social activity, level of health, whether having chronic morbidity problems, level of daily physical activity, whether having difficulty in activities of daily living or not, whether having difficulty instrumental activities of daily living, Monthly per capita consumption expenditure, and place of residence (urban or rural), which were quantified as suggested by the researchers [8].

Responses and scoring for the Life Satisfaction parameters were as follows: Strongly agree - score 7, mostly agree - score 6, slightly agree- score 5. Agree or disagree - score 4, slightly disagree - score 3, mostly disagree - score 2, strongly disagree - score 1. If each item response was at least “Mostly agree”, then, the life satisfaction score was considered as high. Otherwise, it was considered as low to medium life satisfaction score. The sum of scores of the five life satisfaction parameters was worked out as the life satisfaction score of the respondents. The data was analysed as proportion, scores and using relevant statistical tests.

## Results

Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents falling within the low to medium and high categories of life satisfaction, which were classified based on the consideration of all the five parameters of life satisfaction under the study. Table 1 shows the proportion of respondents having different levels of Life Satisfaction.

Life satisfaction category	Respondents (%)
Low to Medium	40
High	60
Grand Total	100

**Table 1:** Categorisation of life satisfaction of the respondents.

The results of logistic regression analysis of the independent variables with the dependent variable, namely, Life Satisfaction Index are shown in Table 2.

Independent variable	Regression coefficient (r)	p
(Intercept)	-0.94	0.81
Age	-1.92	0.02*
Sex	0.35	0.58
Education	0.3	0.51
Present job	0.01	0.97
Importance of religion	-0.23	0.73

Satisfaction in living arrangements	-0.05	0.95
Victim of ill treatment by others	0.99	0.2
Victim of discrimination by others	-0.04	0.96
Membership in organization/s	-0.3	0.65
Level of health	0.75	0.21
Chronic morbidity	-0.53	0.44
Daily physical activity	-0.16	0.76
Difficulty in activities of daily living	0.73	0.01*
Difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living	-0.43	0.05*
Monthly per capita consumption expenditure	0.53	0.15
Place of residence	-0.01	0.99
$R^2 = 0.53; p < 0.05$		

\*Statistically significant

**Table 2:** Results of logistic regression analysis of independent variable scores with life satisfaction score.

Those variables which showed statistically significant relationships with Life Satisfaction under the logistic regression analysis were subjected to odds ratio analysis to find out their degree of contribution to Life Satisfaction. The results are presented in Table 3.

Independent variable	Odds ratio
Age	0.1465
Difficulty in activities of daily living	2.0675
Difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living	1.649

**Table 3:** Results of odds ratio analysis of the scores of variables with life satisfaction score.

The proportion of respondents having a comparatively high range of Life Satisfaction scores were worked out for those independent variables (characteristics of the respondents) having the odds ratios shown in Table 3.

The details are presented in Table 4, which shows the proportion of respondents under two age groups, respondents with and without difficulty in activities of daily living, and respondents with and without difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living, who have a high range of Life Satisfaction score.

Characteristics	Range of life satisfaction score	Range of score as% of maximum possible life satisfaction score	Respondents (%)
Age (years)			
60-69	30-35	85.7-100	56.4
70-79	30-35	85.7-100	77.3
Difficulty in activities of daily living			
Yes	29-35	82.9-100	36
No	29-35	82.9-100	85.3
Difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living			
Yes	30-35	85.7-100	58.6
No	30-35	85.7-100	66.7

**Table 4:** Details of respondents under various characteristics of the respondents having a high range of life satisfaction scores.

## Discussion

77 to 78% of respondents have given the responses, namely, Mostly agree, and Strongly agree (when considered together) for the following four life satisfaction parameters, namely, In most ways, my life is close to ideal, The conditions of my life are excellent, I am satisfied with my life, I have achieved the essential things I want in my life. 61% respondents have given these two responses (when considered together) for the fifth parameter, namely, If I could live the life once more, I would change almost nothing. 11% have neither agreed nor disagreed with this, indicating their uncertainty towards it. These results primarily indicate that the respondents are satisfied with their lives at this old age, which could also be an outcome of achieving the essential things required in their lives, about which a high proportion of respondents have agreed as mentioned above. Maximum proportion (60%) of respondents has high life satisfaction, while 40% respondents fall in the low to medium life satisfaction category (Table 1). The high proportion of respondents agreeing mostly and strongly with all the five life satisfaction parameters, as already mentioned, supports this trend.

In a State like Kerala in India, where the educational level of people is mostly high, people usually get jobs with a comfortable salary. Even those who are working in informal sectors such as plumbers, electricians, construction workers etc. get a daily wage of Rs 1000 and more. Hence, the respondents under this study who are aged more than 60 years and mostly leading a restful life after their retirement may be having good savings and may not be facing significant problems in life. Further, their children might have been mostly married off and settled, and hence, family responsibilities would be less. All these factors may be making the respondents in this study feel well satisfied in life. Economic condition has been reported to be a major factor influencing the life satisfaction of elderly people [9].

The results of logistic regression analysis revealed that Nagelkerke  $R^2$  value of the model is 0.53, indicating that all the independent variables (characteristics of the respondents) of the study together explain 53% of the variation observed in life satisfaction of the respondents (Table 2). Among them, significant predictors of life satisfaction include age, difficulty in activities of daily living, and difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living, as indicated by  $p$  values less than 0.05. Significant Chi-square value of 49.739 with  $p < 0.02$  means that the model as a whole is statistically significant. Performance diagnostics shows that the logistic regression model correctly predicts 80% of the cases, with a high classification accuracy of 86.67%. This clearly indicates that the considered variables and the model are well suited for explaining life satisfaction.

Under a study carried out in India, difficulties with daily activities were found to be associated with less life satisfaction among older adults, older adults exhibited a significantly greater likelihood of higher life satisfaction compared to those who were comparatively younger to them, and those who rated their health as good exhibited significantly higher likelihoods of having higher life satisfaction scores [8]. Difficulties in undertaking daily activities can contribute to poor health from physical and psychological perspectives.

### Analysis of the results of odds ratio test (Table 3) are presented below:

- **Age:** With respect to the age of respondents, the odds ratio value of 0.146 (Table 3) indicates that each unit increase in age decreases the odds of lower life satisfaction by 85.4%, implying that comparatively older individuals are less likely to have low life satisfaction.
- **Difficulty in activities of daily living:** The odds ratio of 2.068 for this variable (Table 3) indicates that each unit increase in difficulty in activities of daily living more than doubles the odds of lower life satisfaction, suggesting a strong association of difficulty in activities of daily living with lower life satisfaction.
- **Difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living:** Table 3 shows an odds ratio of 1.649 for this variable. This means that each unit increase in difficulty in carrying out instrumental activities of daily living increases the odds of lower life satisfaction by about 64.9%, indicating that more difficulty in carrying out instrumental activities of daily living is associated with lower life satisfaction.

Difficulty in undertaking activities of daily living and activities which are instrumental in daily living can naturally cause significant discomfort for elderly people, which can even lead to a psychological feeling of less wellbeing in their life. This may be the reason why these two characteristics of the respondents have produced the results on less life satisfaction for those who are having these conditions. It can be made out from Table 4 that while 77.3% of respondents in the higher age group of 70 to 79 years have high life satisfaction score in the range of 85.7 to 100% of the maximum possible score, only 56.4% of those in the comparatively lower age group of 60 to 69 years have a life satisfaction score in the range of 85.7 to 100% of the maximum possible score. While 85.3% of respondents reporting no difficulty in activities of daily living are having high life satisfaction score in the range of 82.9 to 100% of the maximum possible score, only 36% of those having such a difficulty have a score in this range (Table 4). Further, only 58.6% of respondents who report difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living get a high life satisfaction score in the range of 85.7 to 100% of the maximum possible score, as compared to 66.7% respondents getting this life satisfaction score among those who did

not have such a difficulty (Table 4). These findings justify the results of odds ratio analysis shown in Table 3, which indicated that people in the age group of 70 to 79 years have comparatively more life satisfaction, while those who have difficulty in activities of daily living as well as difficulty in undertaking instrumental activities of daily living have comparatively less life satisfaction only.

Promotion of health status, providing social and cognitive support to older adults has been suggested for improving their level of life satisfaction [10]. Social support can be obtained by involving in social activities through institutions located in the area. Cognitive support refers to the support provided for facilitating the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension [11]. While 41% of respondents in the 70 to 79 age group under the present study reported good health, only 32.4% respondents in the 60 to 69 age group reported that they had good health. This may probably be a reason for the respondents in the 70 to 79 age group having higher life satisfaction under the study. Data also shows that in the age group of 70 to 79 years, 81.8% report membership in organisation/s, which is an indicator of being socially active. However, in the 60 to 69 age group, only 69.2% have reported membership in organisation/s. This shows that the respondents in the higher age group of 70 to 79 years are more socially active than those in the 60 to 69 age group, which could also give them cognitive support in terms of understanding things they need in a better manner through interaction with the members and participating in the activities of the organizations they are involved in. This may be another probable reason for respondents in the 70 to 79 age group having higher life satisfaction under the study. Further, in the 70 to 79 years age group, only 22.7% reported having difficulty in daily activities, as compared to a higher proportion (26.9%) reporting this in the 60 to 69 years age group. Similarly, 33.3% of respondents in the 60 to 69 years age group reported difficulty in undertaking instrumental activities in daily life, when compared to a lesser proportion (18.2%) only reporting in the 70 to 79 years age group. All these findings also help to substantiate the odds ratio result for age (Table 3), which shows that comparatively older individuals are less likely to have low life satisfaction, when compared to younger adults.

## Conclusion

Logistic regression analysis has shown that all the independent variables (characteristics of the respondents) of the study together explain 53% of the variation observed in life satisfaction of the respondents. Among them, significant predictors of life satisfaction include age, difficulty in activities of daily living, and difficulty in instrumental activities of daily living. Odds ratio results indicate that comparatively older individuals are less likely to have low life satisfaction, increase in difficulty in activities of daily living contributes

to lower life satisfaction, and difficulty in carrying out instrumental activities of daily living is associated with lower life satisfaction. The results of odds ratio analysis are supported by the comparatively higher proportion of respondents having high life satisfaction scores for the upper age group of 70 to 79 years, for respondents reporting no difficulty in activities of daily living, and for those who report no difficulty in carrying out instrumental activities of daily living. Better health status of people in the 70 to 79 years age group, and more social involvement by them through participation in the activities of the organizations they are involved in, as observed in the study may also be contributing to higher life satisfaction for them.

60% of the respondents in the study have high life satisfaction. Good educational level observed among people in Kerala enables them to get jobs with comfortable salary/wages, including people working in the informal sector such as plumbers, electricians etc. Hence, the respondents under this study who are aged more than 60 years and mostly leading a restful life after their retirement may be having good savings, and may not be facing significant problems in life also. Further, their children might have been mostly married off and settled, and hence, family responsibilities would be less. All these factors may be making the respondents in this study feel well satisfied in life.

It will be useful to undertake such type of studies on different psychological aspects of elderly people so that the factors affecting their life can be understood better, and accordingly, various institutions as well as individuals can formulate relevant strategies such as counselling, practice of relaxation techniques etc. for improving their life standards. This appears to be relevant nowadays, since many of the elderly people are living alone, without much social and emotional support from their children and relatives, which could contribute to problems in their physical and psychological wellbeing.

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