

Life Attitude: Unlocking Successful Aging

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The most popular variable in gerontology at the moment is successful aging, a complex construct with many facets. Successful aging has grown in significance as the elderly population is increasing day by day all over the globe. Life attitude is a crucial component of successful aging. Life attitude is reflected in meaning and purpose in life. A person who is high on personal meaning has a clear sense of direction in life, strives for goals that are compatible with that purpose, is content with past accomplishments, and is driven to a meaningful future. The current study looked at the contribution of life attitude towards successful aging. A sample of 300 older adults was selected for the present study. The tools employed in the study were: Successful Aging Scale by Reker (2009) and Life Attitude Scale - Revised by Reker (1992). Both Pearson product moment method of correlation and regression analysis were used to analyse the data. The result showed that dimensions of life attitude i.e. purpose in life, coherence, choice/responsibility, goal seeking, personal meaning index and existential transcendence are significant predictors of successful aging. The study implies that having meaning and purpose in life plays an important role in successful aging.

Keywords: Successful aging, life attitude, meaning in life, purpose in life, older adults.

“It’s not how old you are, its how you are old”

- Jules Renard

Each of us experiences the natural process of aging. This is true whether we appear to be ageless (like Jennifer Lopez) or proudly embrace our grey hair (like Andie MacDowell), time inevitably passes, making us older, yes, but also wiser, more self-assured, and even sexier than ever before. Yes, we live in a world that is preoccupied with youth, but that doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy who we are at any age. This later phase of life is going to be amazing, even though you’re starting to notice some grey or fine lines and may not be as energetic as you once were. Of course, only if you go into it with an open mind, lots of support, and self-assurance.

Successful aging is the concept that is popularized for healthy and active aging. It combines a word that is typically thought of

negatively (aging) with positively (successful). How can one “succeed” in a process that typically results in decline and disability? The definitions provide the answer to the question. Flood (2003) describes successful aging as “the individual’s perceived satisfaction in adapting to the physical and functional changes of aging while experiencing spiritual connectedness and a sense of meaning or purpose in life”. In all four primary aspects of life—physical, functional, psychological, and spiritual, Flood recognized the value of an individual’s sense of fulfillment and personal perspective. According to Wong and Fry (1998), a feeling of purpose in life can aid individuals in overcoming adverse circumstances and leading healthy and fulfilling lives. Meaning and purpose in life are reflections of one’s approach towards life. One of the most studied topics in psychology research is the meaning of life.

According to King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006), "Lives may be experienced as meaningful when they are felt to have significance beyond the trivial or momentary, to have a purpose, or to have a coherence that transcends chaos". Meaning in life was described by Steger (2012) as "the web of connections, understandings, and interpretations that help us comprehend our experience and formulate plans directing our energies to the achievement of our desired future". Our sense of meaning gives us the impression that our lives matter, have a purpose, and are greater than the sum of our seconds, days, and years. While seeking meaning is linked to negative outcomes, existing meaning is linked to wellness benefits like resiliency, optimism, and enjoyment, among others (McClive-Reed, Gellis, Kenaley, & Kim, 2020). According to research by Pirtle, Wang, Brown, and Lainas (2019), anxiety and meaning in life are mutually exclusive. In their study, Ho, Cheung, and Cheung (2010) demonstrated how having a purpose in life enhances one's wellbeing. Adolescents' life satisfaction is related to their sense of purpose in life. According to Silverstein and Heap (2014), a sense of coherence-the capacity to comprehend, control, and derive meaning from life-strongly correlates with well-being.

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that life attitude, which is expressed in meaning and purpose in life, plays a very important role in attaining successful aging, although research in this area is lacking especially in the Indian context. The researchers attempted to gather more empirical evidence in the support of following variables i.e., the contribution of life attitude in predicting successful aging.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the relationship between life attitude and successful aging among older adults.
2. To study the contribution of life attitude in predicting successful aging among older adults.

Method

Design

A correlational research design was used in the present study.

Sample

300 senior individuals of both sexes (122 women and 178 men), with a mean age of 68.35 and a range of 61 to 75 years, were selected depending on availability. At least the 10th grade must have been completed by participants. The study's participants were capable of carrying out daily tasks and coexisting with their families. Elderly people who were single, divorced, or remarried, had any major illnesses, or lived in nursing homes, dharamshalas, or ashrams were not included in the study. The data was collected from different districts of Haryana State.

Tool(s):

With their informed consent and after receiving proper assurances that the information gathered would be kept private, the participants underwent the administration of the following measures.

1. *Successful Aging Scale [SAS; Reker, 2009]* This scale serves as a measure of successful aging. It is a 14-item scale that examines how people feel about getting older. Each statement has a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scores range from 14 to 98, with lower scores denoting poorer successive aging and higher numbers denoting better successive aging. The internal consistency reliability for the successful aging scale was 0.84. The test-

retest reliability coefficient of the SAS was found to be 0.71. Regarding convergent validity, the scale was found significantly correlated with resilience, emotional intelligence, and self-rated physical health.

2. *Life Attitude Profile – R [LAP-R; Reker, 1992]*: This scale, which has 48 items, measures one’s sense of meaning and purpose in life. A 7-point Likert-type scale with the options “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” makes up the scale. The scale goes from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” with a score ranging from 1 to 7. The LAP-R scale consists of two composite scales (Personal Meaning Index & Existential Transcendence) and six subscales: purpose in life (PU), coherence (CO), choice/responsibility (CR), death acceptance (DA), existential vacuum (EV), and goal seeking (GS). The higher the scores on the scale, the higher will be the reported dimension. The range of the internal consistency coefficient was 0.77 to 0.91.

Procedure

A purposeful sample of 300 older persons was chosen and personally contacted in order to achieve the goal of the present investigation. After being briefed on the purpose of the research activity, a rapport was established. Then, the questionnaires and detailed instructions were given to them. The scales were gathered following the administration. According to the relevant manuals, the scoring was carried out. The data was collected and subjected to statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

To fulfill the first objective “To study the relationship between life attitude and successful aging among older adults”, Pearson product-moment method of correlation was applied. The obtained results have been represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Inter-Correlations between life attitude and successful aging (N=300).

Variables		Successful aging
Life Attitude Dimensions	Purpose in life	.301**
	Coherence	.287**
	Choice/responsibility	.221**
	Death acceptance	-.016
Composite Scales	Existential vacuum	-.079
	Goal seeking	.240**
	Personal meaning index	.344**
	Existential transcendence	.249**

The correlation coefficients between life attitude and successful aging are shown in Table 1. The findings indicate that purpose in life, coherence, choice/responsibility, goal seeking, personal meaning index and existential transcendence have positive and significant relationships with successful aging. The findings implicate that having a sense of coherence, direction, or purpose in life, freedom to direct their own life, and desire to get more out of life helps the elderly to age well. The result of the study also concludes that having meaning, goals, and a mission in life or being in search of meaning motivates the elderly to positively adapt to the changes of old age or helps to achieve successful aging among senior citizens. Acceptance of death and existential vacuum has no significant relation with successful aging. Positive attitudes are associated with higher levels of satisfaction and better physical and mental health, according to Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson, and Judd (2012). Having a purpose in life is an essential motivator for older persons to preserve their physical and mental health (Musich, Wang, Kraemer, Hawkins, & Wicker, 2018). Poor mental health is caused by a lack of purpose (Hedberg, Gustafson, & Brulin, 2010; Martin, Eglit, Maldonado, Daly, Liu, Tu, & Jeste, 2013).

To fulfill the second objective “To study the contribution of life attitude in predicting successful aging among older adults” linear regression was applied for the dimensions of life attitude i.e. purpose in life, coherence, choice/responsibleness, goal seeking, personal meaning index, existential transcendence with successful aging. The results for linear regression have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Linear regression analysis for predicting successful aging from the significantly correlated dimensions of life attitude i.e., “purpose in life, coherence, choice/responsibleness, goal seeking, personal meaning index and existential transcendence.

Variables	R ²	β
Purpose in life	.090	.30
Coherence	.082	.29
Choice/responsibleness	.049	.22
Goal seeking	.058	.24
Personal meaning index	.119	.34
Existential transcendence	.062	.25
N	300	

The regression analysis for the domains of life attitude is shown in Table 2. The table shows that, with a variance of 9 % ($\hat{\alpha} = .30$), the first dimension of life attitude, or purpose in life, is a significant predictor of successful aging. According to the beta value, a person’s ability to age successfully into their advanced years is influenced by their sense of purpose in life. A sense of purpose in life inspires people to lead active and healthy lives. It also aids in the dispersal of elderly boredom.

With a variance of 8.2% ($\beta = .29$), the second dimension, coherence, also significantly contributes to successful aging. This suggests that developing one’s

understanding of oneself and other people also promotes active aging. Coherence serves as a useful indicator of good aging in this context. With a variance of 4.9% ($\beta = .22$), the third component of life attitude, choice/responsibility, also showed up as a beneficial factor of successful aging. The elderly feel valued when they have the choice, which makes it simple for them to adjust to changes brought by aging. Therefore, independence plays a significant role in successful aging.

With a variation of 5.8% ($\beta = .24$), the dimension of goal seeking also showed promise as a predictor of successful aging. Having a purpose at work prevents seniors from feeling useless and keeps them engaged in life. Goal-setting hence contributes positively to good aging.

With a variation of 11.9% ($\beta = .34$), the personal meaning index emerged as a very excellent predictor of successful aging when it comes to composite scores. Successful aging is more likely to be achieved with a meaningful and purposeful existence. As a person ages, one experiences feelings of emptiness, abrupt bodily changes, and a lack of employment that make a person to feel extremely useless. However, when life became meaningful and there was a purpose to pursue, it was simpler to accept aging. The personal meaning index became a positive indicator of successful aging as a result.

Existential transcendence, another composite score, with a variance of 6.2% ($\beta = .25$) and is similarly an excellent predictor of successful aging. It is simpler to age well if one accepts old age and has a positive outlook on life. To make the aging period more fruitful, it is preferable to embrace the changes with a good attitude rather than dwelling on the past and present.

According to Musich et al. (2018), older persons are intrinsically motivated to maintain their physical and mental health.

Hedberg, Gustafson, and Brulin (2010) and Martin et al. (2019) both found that having no purpose negatively affects one's mental health. Additionally, Janusz (2017) discovered that an important component of healthy aging is a sense of coherence and a psychological health predictor. A few psychologists have also discovered a strong link between meaningfulness and positive affect that supports successful aging (Hicks & King, 2009; Hicks, Schlegel, & King, 2010).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, having a positive outlook on life and having a sense of direction in life are critical to good aging. Older individuals might feel valuable and deserving when they find significance in their lives. The importance of successful aging has increased as the global old population continues to rise. In order to help senior people live actively and delightfully instead of regretfully, psychologists and counsellors must take the initiative to organize workshops to raise knowledge about useful aging from middle age onward.

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