

## **Life Satisfaction and Alienation of Elderly Males and Females**

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The present study was intended to compare the alienation and life satisfaction of elderly men and women. For this a sample of 74 men and 102 women belonging to Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala were selected. Life satisfaction and Alienation were measured using appropriate standardized psychological tests. The results showed that elderly men experience less alienation than the elderly women, and the results were found to be significant. Both the groups do not exhibit significant differences in their life satisfaction.

As population turns increasingly grey, both elderly men and women cannot escape from being affected by alienation. The demographic scenario in Kerala shows that women have a greater life span than men (U.N. 2002). This hike would probably reflect that a greater life span of women, may result in an increase in the number of widows. Though the state is in the forefront of literacy, elderly women have a lower educational status and women going outside the home for jobs were not common till some years back. This leads to various difficulties for women.

Advanced old age brings with it certain health problems like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, urinary disorders etc (Sivakumar, 1998). Besides these elderly women have to face many psychological problems. Though both men and women have to face these problems, the financial dependence and decreased physical strength magnifies the difficulties of women. Research also provides support for gender differences in physical and mental health, life satisfaction and social activities of aging persons (Shirolkar, 1995; and

Jamuna, 1996). Nathawat (1996) reported higher positive affect and life satisfaction among the elderly enduring spouse relationships.

However, Kant (1996) observed significant difference between males and females regarding life satisfaction, with females experiencing lower life satisfaction than men.

Gender differences were also observed in the case of coping strategies when life dissatisfaction was high and low (Reddy & Srinivas, 1996) and in adjustment problems (Balachandran & Raju, 1997). The main objectives of the present study were to find out whether elderly men experience significantly lower degrees of alienation and high life satisfaction compared to elderly women.

### **Method**

#### **Sample:**

The total sample for the study consisted of 176 elderly people selected using stratified random sampling technique. Out of them 74 were men and 102 women. They belonged to

different localities of Thiruvananthapuram district representing different socio-economic classes. The age range of the sample was 60-79 with a mean age of 69.2 years.

**Measures:**

Alienation was assessed by Alien Inventory (Gireesan & Sananda Raj, 1991), which consists of 50 items presented on a five-point response scale. The test measures five dimensions of alienation, viz., Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, Normlessness, Isolation, and

Self-estrangement. Each of the dimensions is defined below in terms of trait interpretation.

*Powerlessness:* The feeling that the individual is an object dominated and controlled by other people; it refers to one's inability to control one's destiny.

*Meaninglessness:* A lack of clarity as to what the individual ought to believe in; the individual's psychic system wanders in search of meaning.

*Normlessness:* The individual feels that norms have lost their regulatory power; frustrated hopes with regard to socially prescribed norms.

*Isolation:* The individual feels that he is purposefully deprived from interacting and integrating with others; feels isolated from society, lacks satisfaction with the group.

*Self-estrangement:* The failure to realize one's potential; feeling that nothing in the individual himself or what he has done is valued for itself.

*Alienation Total:* A combination of all the five characteristics. In other words, it is a condition in which the person experiences himself as alien - a feeling of singleness.

The re-test reliability coefficients of the test for the various dimensions ranged from 0.67 to 0.73, while split-half reliability ranged from 0.71 to 0.83. The validity coefficients of the test vary from 0.58 and 0.83, against

appropriate external criteria (concurrent validity, as reported in the test manual).

Life satisfaction was measured by Life Satisfaction Index devised by Raakhee and Sananda Raj (1997). The test consists of 42 items on a five-point scale. The scale provides scores for three dimensions namely, Social Satisfaction, Personal Satisfaction, and General Happiness, and also for Life Satisfaction Total.

*Social Satisfaction:* It manifests in good social relationship, active participation in social activities, helping others etc.

*Personal Satisfaction:* A person having high life satisfaction will be confident of his abilities and able to face life courageously without being disappointed.

*General Happiness:* A happy individual will be generally satisfied with life, have a positive approach towards life, will be mentally healthy, will not allow little anxieties and worries to affect his happiness.

*Life Satisfaction Total:* It indicates social and personal satisfaction as well as general happiness. Life satisfaction manifests itself in self-confidence, sociability, and feeling of competence and happiness.

The manual of the scale indicates that it is a reliable and valid measure for use with elderly people in Kerala. The split-half reliability ranges between 0.7 to 0.9 and also have high content validity.

**Procedure:**

The subjects were approached personally and rapport was established. On assurance of strict confidentiality the personal data schedule and the other two tests were administered. The participants were given assistance to complete the tests, either to read or mark their responses because of their visual or health problems. The subjects were requested to clarify all their doubts in answering the items and to complete all the questions, in each scale.

Coded data were analysed with the help of computer facilities to compare the life satisfaction and alienation of elderly men and elderly women, t-test for large independent sample was used.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1: Mean, SD and t- value of Alienation (males = 74 and females = 102).**

Variables	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value
Powerlessness	Male	28.07	7.3	-2.17*
	Female	30.03	4.68	
Meaninglessness	Male	27.7	6.13	-3.47**
	Female	30.65	4.94	
Normlessness	Male	28.81	5.3	-1.03
	Female	29.63	5.1	
Isolation	Male	29.35	5.93	-3.78**
	Female	32.15	3.89	
Self-estrangement	Male	29.41	8.57	-1.5
	Female	30.82	3.62	
Overall Alienation	Male	143.38	26.68	-2.98**
	Female	153.27	17.52	

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

**Table 2: Means, SDs and t-values (males =74 and females = 102).**

Variables	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value
Social Satisfaction	Male	52.2	7.24	-1.06
	Female	53.3	6.51	
Personal Satisfaction	Male	51.82	6.17	-1.67
	Female	53.28	5.38	
General Happiness	Male	52.82	5.39	-1.59
	Female	54.08	4.99	
Overall Life Satisfaction	Male	156.85	16.45	-1.65
	Female	160.67	14.2	

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Tables 1 and 2 indicate the elderly women scored a greater mean value for the alienation variables viz., powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, self-estrangement, and alienation total than the elderly men. This shows that elderly women experience more alienation than elderly men do. The t- value for the variable powerlessness

is  $-2.17$ , which is significant at 0.05 level. The t- values for meaninglessness and isolation and alienation total are  $-3.47$ ,  $-3.78$ , and  $-2.98$  respectively which are significant at 0.01 level. The t-value for normlessness and self-estrangement are  $-1.03$  and  $-1.5$  respectively, which are not significant statistically. The mean scores obtained by the male and female aged for the variable powerlessness are 28.07 and 30.03 respectively. The results show greater feelings of powerlessness among the aged females. In India, women used to occupy a superior position in the family. But changes in the family structure and social values resulted in a degradation of their status. Irrespective of their age, females feel powerless in this male-dominated society.

For the variable meaninglessness, the mean score obtained by the aged males and females are 27.7 and 30.65 respectively. The females who are more attached to their children spent majority of their life for the welfare of their children. After the children become adults and search their own ways the aged find themselves with nothing to do. They find no meaning in their life. The mean scores obtained by the aged male and female groups for the variable normlessness are 28.81 and 29.63 respectively which indicates that both the groups experience same level of normlessness.

The mean scores for the variable isolation obtained by the aged males and females are 29.35 and 32.15 respectively. This shows that greater isolation exists among aged females. The lower educational status of the aged females make it difficult for them to move easily along with the changing world. Also when compared to the aged males, the lower degree of social contacts and activities of the aged females may increase the isolation. For the variable self-estrangement the mean scores obtained by the aged males and aged females are 29.41 and 30.82 respectively which indicates same degree of self-estrangement among the two groups. For overall alienation,

the mean scores obtained by elder males is 143.38 and that of the elder males is 153.27. The greater powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation came out as the reasons for greater alienation among the aged females.

The mean scores obtained by the aged males for the variables social satisfaction, personal satisfaction, general happiness and life satisfaction total are 52.2, 51.82, 52.82, and 156.85 respectively and that of the aged females are 53.3, 53.28, 54.08 and 160.67 respectively. The t-value obtained for the variables social satisfaction, personal satisfaction, general happiness and Overall life satisfaction are  $-1.06$ ,  $-1.67$ ,  $-1.59$ , and  $-1.65$  respectively which are not statistically significant. This indicates the same level of life satisfaction among the aged males and females.

The results of this study are not in line with the study by Nathawat (1996) whose findings showed that males experience more life satisfaction than females. Generally males enjoy more independence and financial security than females. Age puts a barrier to their independence and activities and this may account for the feeling of dissatisfaction in them. Counselling programs may reduce the alienation in elderly women. By doing some minor jobs they can attain economic stability. They should also engage in some hobbies. The youngsters should love and respect the aged and give more physical attention and emotional caring to them. The degree of communication between the aged and all the other family members should be increased.

It can be concluded that aged men experience less alienation than aged women. Four variables of alienation differences were found, which were significant at 0.01 level. The two groups do not exhibit any significant differences between themselves in their life satisfaction.

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