

LATE ADULthood (OLD AGE) AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract. The present study examines the level of psychological well-being in late adulthood (old age). Late adulthood represents one of the significant stages of human development. Alongside other developmental issues, researchers in developmental psychology are increasingly interested in understanding the psychological well-being of older adults.

Psychological well-being is understood as a holistic personal state reflecting life satisfaction and mental health. The aim of the study was to determine the level of psychological well-being among older adults in Georgia and to explore whether similar patterns emerge as those reported in international research, which suggests that age alone does not determine life satisfaction. Instead, factors such as physical health, social integration, family conditions, and self-perception play a more substantial role.

The sample consisted of 32 participants aged between 60 and 79 years. The research instrument was Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. It was hypothesized that psychological well-being among Georgian older adults would be lower than that reported in international studies.

Contrary to expectations, the results revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between age and psychological well-being ($\rho = .37$; $p = .038$), indicating that well-being tends to increase with age. These findings are consistent with contemporary research suggesting that psychological well-being is not determined solely by chronological age.

Keywords: late adulthood; psychological well-being; Ryff's model; successful aging.

Introduction. Old age has traditionally been associated with declining physical health, reduced functional abilities, changes in social roles, and cumulative losses. Such perspectives often lead to the assumption that psychological well-being must inevitably decrease with advancing age. This view is reinforced by medical and societal discourses that emphasize risks and limitations while neglecting the potential psychological resources that may persist or even strengthen in later life.

Contemporary positive psychology and developmental psychology propose an alternative view. Ryff's model of psychological well-being conceptualizes well-being not merely as hedonic happiness, but as a multidimensional construct encompassing self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships. From this perspective, individuals may maintain or even enhance psychological well-being in late adulthood despite physical decline, provided they find meaning, adjust goals, and sustain emotionally significant relationships.

Psychological well-being in older age involves a cognitive evaluation of one's life quality, personal achievements, and life meaning. With aging, individuals often re-evaluate life priorities, past experiences,

and future perspectives. Classical research by Larson (1978) demonstrated that well-being in old age is only weakly related to chronological age (Craig, 2002).

Heidrich and Ryff (1993) further explored how older adults maintain positive outlooks despite poor health. Their findings indicated that social comparison plays a crucial role: individuals compare themselves with peers and adjust their goals accordingly, which supports adaptive functioning.

Recent meta-analytic evidence also supports the centrality of social relationships. Santini et al. (2022), analyzing 78 empirical studies, found strong associations between emotional closeness, perceived social support, and psychological well-being. Loneliness was identified as a major risk factor for depressive symptoms and reduced life satisfaction.

In Georgia, however, empirical studies specifically addressing psychological well-being in late adulthood remain scarce. One notable large-scale study by Waidler et al. (2017) examined the impact of adult children's migration on elderly well-being and found no direct negative effect. Instead, well-being was influenced by gender, poverty, rural living, and other socio-demographic factors.

According to a recent UNFPA report (Kachkachishvili & Papiashvili, 2022), approximately 52% of older adults in Georgia (65+) report emotional loneliness, while 45% experience social isolation.

Given the limited local evidence, the present study aimed to explore whether psychological well-being among older adults in Georgia is indeed low.

Method

Participants

The sample included 32 individuals aged 60–79 years, divided into three age groups:

- 60–65 years ($n = 17$)
- 66–70 years ($n = 9$)
- 71–79 years ($n = 6$)

The sampling was non-probabilistic; therefore, the study is not representative.

Instrument

The Georgian-adapted 54-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale was used. The scale measures six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Participants completed the questionnaire individually or in small groups under researcher supervision. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Data analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics for total PWB
- Internal reliability (Cronbach's α)
- One-way ANOVA for age group comparisons
- Spearman's rank correlation between age and PWB

Results and Discussion

The average psychological well-being score was $M = 154.66$ ($SD = 9.92$), indicating a moderate-to-high level of well-being. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, most participants demonstrated relatively high well-being.

Internal reliability for the full scale was low ($\alpha = .42$), likely due to the multidimensional structure and small sample size.

ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences between age groups ($F(2,29)=2.84$; $p=.075$), though the effect size was moderate ($\eta^2=.16$). The highest well-being was observed in the 66–70 age group.

Spearman's correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between age and well-being ($p = .37$; $p = .038$), supporting the "paradox of aging," whereby psychological well-being remains stable or improves despite physical decline.

These findings align with socioemotional selectivity theory, suggesting that older adults prioritize emotionally meaningful goals and relationships, thereby enhancing subjective well-being.

Conclusion. The study does not support the assumption that psychological well-being declines in late adulthood. On the contrary:

- Overall well-being levels were not low.
- Age trends indicated growth rather than decline.
- The correlation between age and well-being was positive.

Late adulthood appears to be not merely a period of loss, but also a phase of emotional regulation, adaptation, and psychological resilience.

However, due to methodological limitations (small, non-representative sample), results cannot be generalized. Future studies should involve larger, randomized samples and include additional measures such as depression, loneliness, and social support.

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