



# A study on psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods

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## ABSTRACT

Well-being is said as a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity. Psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Recent psychological research has shown a shift from an emphasis on disorder and dysfunction to a focus on well-being and positive mental health. Since, in adult age many changes occur which may eventually induce psychological disturbances among them; the present study has been undertaken to assess the psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods. A total number of 120 samples were selected for the study. Ryff's scales of Psychological Well-being (Ryff, 1989 and Ryff and Keyes, 1995) was administered to collect the data. The results of the study revealed that the psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods was in average range and a significant difference in psychological well-being adults during middle and late adulthood periods were found.

## INTRODUCTION

With the increase in life expectancy, there has been a substantial increase in the number of elderly persons across the globe in the past decades. Even though a universal phenomenon, aging is not a uniform experience among all elderly. This developmental phenomenon brings along a number of changes in the physical, psychological, hormonal and the social conditions. The aged become increasingly dependent on others. The disintegration of joint family system, rapid industrialization and urbanization and changing social

values have together caused serious problem for the aged. These social, psychological, and biological factors contribute to a great extent towards the well-being of elderly. Well-being is said as a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity. The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO's definition of health: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Hence, good health means both physical and psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being refers to how people

evaluate their lives. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. The concept of feeling good incorporates not only the positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also such emotions as interest, engagement, confidence and affection. The concept of functioning effectively (in a psychological sense) involves the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose (working towards a goal) and experiencing positive relationships. Recent psychological research has shown a shift from an emphasis on disorder and dysfunction to a focus on well-being and positive mental health.

Since, in adult age many changes occur which may eventually induce psychological disturbances among them; the present study has been undertaken with following objectives :

- To assess the psychological well-being of adults during middle and late adulthood periods.
- To find out the differences in psychological well-being of middle and late adulthood periods.

#### **Hypothesis:**

- The psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods are high.
- There is no difference in psychological well-being of adults during middle and late adulthood periods.

Psychological well-being is one of the key elements of Health as defined by World health Organization. Many research studies have been conducted towards negative as well as positive psychological functioning.

Research shows that physical activity, social connection, mental health literacy and a sense of purpose are key factors in enhancing and maintaining older people's mental health and wellbeing (NSW Institute of Psychiatry, 2008 and Jorm, 2000). Older people who live in societies that value them have better health outcomes. Indeed, research has shown that countries who appreciate the elderly people's contribution, view them positively, and have a later retirement age, have fewer deaths from suicide (Yur'yev *et al.*, 2010). Studies also reveals that socio-economic status are associated with higher levels of well being and lower rates of disorders (Dolan *et al.*, 2008; Ryff and Singer, 1996). Lyubomirsky and her colleagues suggested that intentional activities, that are activities over which we have control, are very important drivers of psychological well-being (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). Tandon (2017) found that there were no significant

difference in psychological well-being among elderly residing in old age home and residing in their home. The study conducted by Chamuah and Sankar (2017) confirmed that male elderly subjects have better psychological wellbeing than female elderly subjects.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### **Location of the study:**

The study was conducted in Jorhat town of Assam, India. Two Old people's association of Jorhat town were selected purposively for the study depending on the size and attendance of members of the association.

### **Sample:**

A total number of 120 samples were selected randomly for the study. The samples consisted of two categories - adults in middle adulthood period (40 - 60 years) and adults in late adulthood period (60 years and above). Samples for each category were equally distributed.

### **Tool:**

Ryff's scales of Psychological Wellbeing (Carol Ryff, 1989 and Ryff and Keyes, 1995) was used for the. The scale measures six theoretically motivated dimensions of psychological wellbeing, which are: Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relations with others, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance. The definition of the dimensions as per the scale are-

- Autonomy - independence and self-determination;
- Environmental mastery - the ability to manage one's life;
- Personal growth - being open to new experiences;
- Positive relations with others - having satisfying, high quality relationships;
- Purpose in life - believing that one's life is meaningful;
- Self-acceptance - a positive attitude towards oneself and one's past life.

### **Procedure of data collection:**

The respondents were contacted and the purpose of the study was explained to them before the questionnaire was handed over. The whole procedure to fill the inventory was explained to them fully and clearly. It was also made clear to them that their scores would be kept secret. A suitable date was given to them for collecting

the questionnaires. Before collecting the questionnaires, it was checked that none of the subjects left any questions unanswered or had not given more than one opinion against a question. Short informal discussions were also done to gather added information.

## OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

### Hypothesis 1 :

The psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods are high.

The mean score of psychological well-being among adults was found to be 129.24 (N= 120). The data revealed that psychological well-being during middle and late adulthood periods were in average range. Hence, the hypothesis is proved wrong by the findings of the study. Since, psychological well-being is how people evaluate their lives and their feeling of contentment, so it may vary with external factors. The finding is also supported by research studies of Singh *et al.* (1983) and Chandrika and Anantharaman (1982) which revealed that there is a prevalence of depression, lower life satisfaction and more adjustment problems among elderly.

### Hypothesis 2 :

There is no difference in psychological well-being of adults during middle and late adulthood periods.

The result obtained (Table 1) on the area of psychological well-being reveals significant difference among adults of middle and late adulthood periods. The adults in middle adulthood received higher mean score (132.31) as compared adults in late adulthood periods (126.16) with standard deviation 12.54 and 14.85. Findings of the Table 1 shows that  $t(118) = 3.6$  and  $p < .05$  (2 tailed) which indicates that the result is statistically significant. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected and it shows that adults in middle adulthood have more psychological well-being as compared to adults in late adulthood. This

finding is related to the study by Diener *et al.* (1985) which reveal that the major adjustment to be made during old age includes adjustment to physical changes, retirement, loss of spouse and empty nest syndrome, and grand parenthood. If favourable factors such as satisfaction of needs, retention of old friendships, positive social attitudes, etc. are present, they foster ego integrity of the person. However, if adequate supports to sustain and bear the losses are unavailable, older adult may have a sense of insecurity.

To explore differences in psychological well-being between adults in middle adulthood and adults in late adulthood, each dimensions of well-being were analysed. Findings of the study (Fig. 1) revealed a diverse pattern of difference. The dimensions of autonomy and environmental mastery were more in case of adults in late adulthood than adults in middle adulthood. But the dimensions of personal growth and purpose in life, showed a reverse pattern. Other two aspects *i.e.* positive relations with others and self-acceptance, showed no notable differences. The finding can be validated with the research findings of Ryff and Singer (1996) – environmental mastery continued to show incremental patterns with age, purpose in life and personal growth showed declines with aging, and self acceptance revealed

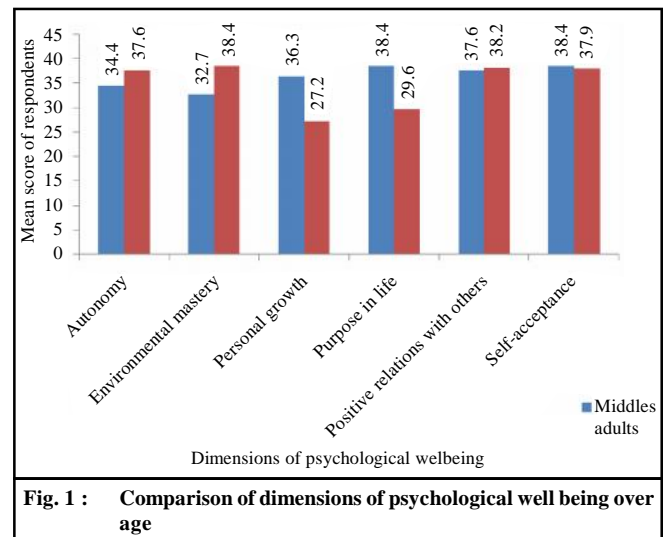


Fig. 1 : Comparison of dimensions of psychological well being over age

Sample group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p
Middle adulthood	60	126.16	12.54	3.6*	118	0.00046
Late adulthood	60	132.31	14.85			

\* indicates significance of value at P=0.05

no age differences. For self-ratings of autonomy and positive relations with others, the results across studies varied between no differences and incremental age patterns.

It was found that autonomy and environment mastery were found more in case of adults in late adulthood than adults in middle adulthood, which may be because with increase in age people become more self-determining and independent and are able to regulate behaviours from within because of life experience whereas adults in middle adulthood period are concerned about the expectations and evaluations of others and may at times depend on judgments of seniors to make important decisions. Adults in middle adulthood period have shown more over adults in late adulthood in the aspects of purpose in life and personal growth. It may be because of the fact that the adults in middle adulthood have still responsibilities to be accomplished and sees self as growing and expanding where in case of the adults in late adulthood period most of the responsibilities are usually accomplished and find no purpose of living a future life.

Even though the difference in the dimension of positive relation with others is negligible but it is more in case of adults in late adulthood, may be because of the empty nest they maintain more social relations. The results reveal that in case of the dimension of self acceptance also the difference is negligible. Adults in middle adulthood have shown little more than adults in late adulthood in the dimension of self-acceptance, may be because they feels that they have control over the changes in life and also have time to recover if required, but adults in late adulthood feel that it is too late to change what has already happened in the past.

### Summary and conclusion :

Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these negative or painful emotions is essential for long term well-being. This study reveals that the psychological well-being of adults is in average range and there are differences in psychological well-being of middle and late adulthood periods. There may be many

drivers of psychological well-being like health condition, socio-economic factors, culture, skills etc. which may influence psychological well-being of adults.

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