



Psychological need satisfaction and well-being in adults aged 80 years and older living in residential homes: Using a self-determination theory perspective

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 October 2013

Received in revised form 28 April 2014

Accepted 28 April 2014

Available online 22 May 2014

Keywords:

Basic psychological needs

Elderly people

Well-being depression

Cluster analysis

ABSTRACT

Based on the self-determination theory (SDT), this study aims to examine the psychological needs satisfaction of the elderly living in residential homes and their relationship with indicators of well-being, and then to test the contribution of each need on these indicators. Participants ($N = 100$; $M_{age} = 86.7$ years, $SD = 3.78$) completed the measures of psychological needs satisfaction, purpose in life, personal growth and geriatric depression. Cluster analyses showed two distinct profiles: one profile with a high satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs and another profile with a low satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs. These profiles did not differ in terms of residents' characteristics, health problems and functional limitations. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) results revealed that the participants with the profile of a high satisfaction of psychological needs have significantly higher levels of purpose in life and personal growth than participants with the profile of a low satisfaction of psychological needs, and no effect of cluster membership on depressive feelings was reported. Moreover, for all participants, relatedness need satisfaction was significantly and positively related to personal growth, and autonomy and relatedness needs satisfaction was related to purpose of life. In conclusion, our results offer evidence that old age can be fruitful and, in consistent with SDT, show that autonomy and relatedness need satisfaction is positively associated with indicators of well-being such as purpose in life and personal growth, considered as essential components of optimal functioning.

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Introduction

Older people continue to live longer and research focuses attention on an increasing longevity without disabilities, emphasizing new approaches to aging well. In this perspective, older people want to age in their own home (Löfqvist et al., 2013). However, Angelini and Laferrère (2012) and

Fernández-Carro (2012) noted changes in lifestyles among the elderly from eighty years and older. A growing number of older people now leave their own homes and opt for accommodation in public or private residential homes, either type “comfort” or type “adjustment” in function of difficulties of old age (health problems, walking difficulties, death of spouse, residential trajectories of children) (Bonvalet, 2007). Whatever the reasons, the elderly seek solutions adapted to their situations and choose residential homes to maintain their autonomy as long as possible (Granborn et al., 2014; Oswald, Wahl, Mollenkopf, & Schilling, 2003).

In the present study, we have chosen to focus on the elderly living in residential homes and on the relationship

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between psychological need satisfaction and the elderly's experience of well-being. Self-determination theory is the theoretical support for our study. This theory assumes that "what varies between people is not how much the needs are needed, but rather, how well the needs are satisfied" (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Indeed, the needs are considered as "nutrients whose satisfaction is essential to psychological growth, integrity and well-being of human" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). When psychological needs are satisfied, individuals experience more self-determined motivation, and the satisfaction of these needs would be related to higher levels of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). In contrast, if these needs are neglected or unmet, ill-being is the predicted result (Ryan & Deci, 2008). Three innate psychological needs were identified: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The need for *autonomy* refers to the degree to which individuals feel volitional and responsible for their own behavior. It is crucial for personal development as it energizes a wide variety of adaptive behaviors and psychological processes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The need for *competence* concerns the degree to which individuals feel effective in their ongoing interactions with the social environment and experience opportunities through which to express their capabilities (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2002). Finally, the need for *relatedness* is defined as the extent to which individuals feel a secure sense of belongingness and connectedness to others in their social environment (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2002).

To date, few studies on psychological need satisfaction have been conducted among the elderly. Most research concern the elderly in nursing homes and have focused on different viewpoints. Custers, Westerhof, Kuin, Gerritsen, and Riksen-Walraven (2010) highlighted some reasons that enable them to explain why need satisfaction could be difficult to achieve in nursing homes. For instance, they indicated that the autonomy need could be under pressure in an institutionalized environment. They cited De Klerck (2005)'s works which indicate that "residents of nursing homes did not have the possibility to decide for themselves" (p. 733). The ability to get up and go to bed according to residents' own preferences is often curtailed in the institutional environment. The same is true for the choice of menus for meals. Moreover, residents are often confronted with physical limitations and depend on others, which may decrease their feeling of competence. Finally, the satisfaction of the need for relatedness is under strain, due to the changed social situation: an impersonal care environment, and/or visits from friends and family becoming more difficult. All environments that would be controlling, that would impose strict rules, and/or that would constrain self-expressivity would be likely to lead to non-self-determined motivation, and decreased need satisfaction would lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including mortality (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For some researchers, therefore, nursing homes do not give older people the opportunity to contribute to the design of their living conditions, and these older people may be at risk for low well-being (e.g., Hellstrom & Sarvimaki, 2007). Other research, however, showed that older people living in high self-determination-oriented nursing homes were comparable in their life satisfaction to those still in regular and low-cost community housing, whereas those residing in low self-determination nursing homes evidenced significantly

poorer psychological outcomes (Vallerand, O'Connor, & Blais, 1989). O'Connor and Vallerand (1994) showed that across their sample of nursing-home residents, greater self-determination was associated with higher levels of psychological adjustment. In this sense, Philippe and Vallerand (2008) confirmed that a supportive environment allowed satisfaction of these needs which, in turn, led to a better psychological adjustment of the elderly in their nursing home. Given the divergent results, the fact that need satisfaction is largely contextually determined (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and only a minority of older people live in nursing homes, studying need satisfaction in a context other than nursing homes may help us to develop a clearer understanding of how these needs contribute to well-being in the elderly aged 80 years and over.

To better understand well-being, research in this area has increasingly recognized the value of considering two perspectives: the hedonic approach, which focuses on the quest of pleasure, satisfaction and subjective happiness and defines well-being as an indicator of quality of life, and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on the use and development of the best in oneself (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Eudaimonia is a multifaceted concept, and different authors have focused on different facets. Ryan and Deci (2001) considered that eudaimonia can be characterized in terms of four motivational concepts: (1) pursuing intrinsic goals and values for their own sake, including personal growth, relationships, community and health, rather than extrinsic goals and values, such as wealth, fame, image and power; (2) behaving in autonomous, volitional or consensual ways, rather than heteronomous or controlled ways; (3) being mindful and acting with a sense of awareness; and (4) behaving in ways that satisfy basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. The first three of these aspects of eudaimonia have positive effects of well-being because they facilitate satisfaction of the psychological needs (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Need satisfaction fosters well-being by maximizing one's potential. In this conception, well-being is defined in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Ryff (1989b) developed an integrated theoretical framework that included six dimensions of well-being at a psychological level (autonomy, purpose in life, environment mastery, positive relationships with others, personal growth and self-acceptance). Psychological well-being is viewed as a complex construct that involves fulfilling one's true self (*daimon*) through the actualization of human potentials and includes growth and meaning-related processes (Ryff, 1989a). Psychological well-being scales were designed as a means for assessing positive psychological functioning and the different dimensions of psychological well-being are considered as outcomes of a life well lived (Ryff & Singer, 1998b). Two dimensions of Ryff's psychological well-being (purpose in life and personal growth) have been identified as the core components of positive psychological functioning and widely recognized as integral components of eudaimonia (Ryff & Singer, 1998a). To be living well, the elderly must have goals and projects that give dignity and meaning to daily activities for the realization of their individual potential (Ryff & Singer, 1998b). On a developmental perspective, Ryff (1989b) indicated that purpose in life and personal growth showed decremental profiles from young adulthood to old

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