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EXPLORATION OF EUDAIMONIC WELL-BEING AMONG SENIOR CITIZENS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Zartashia Kynat Javaid[*1], Ayesha Shahid[2], Sania Ashfaq[3], Eman Nisar[4], Noor Fatima[5]

[*1]Lecturer, Department of Applied Psychology, Government College University Faisalabad;
[2,3,4,5] BS Scholars Applied Psychology, Government College University Faisalabad

Corresponding Author: [*1]zartashiakynat@gcuf.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Eudaimonic well-being is the existence of positive psychological functioning and a sense of thriving, which includes positive connections, personal progress, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Keyes, 2002). Any country's quality of life may be inferred from the eudaimonic well-being of its older population. Investigating the eudaimonic well-being of aging people is crucial to addressing the deficiencies in any nation's citizenry's quality of life. The current study investigates Pakistani older adults' eudaimonic well-being. This is a qualitative study, and the technique used for data collection is semi-structured interviews. Data of 12 interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. Assessment of eudaimonic well-being, the role of gender, other influencing factors, and suggestions for its improvement are discussed. The results showed that the general level of eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens of Pakistan is low. Although women faced discrimination due to their gender, they scored higher on eudaimonia compared to men. It is concluded that implementing certain strategies can improve the eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens and the overall population.

Keywords: Eudaimonic Well-being, Qualitative Study, Thematic Analysis, Senior citizen.

1. INTRODUCTION

All individuals are in the pursuit of a satisfactory life. Most if not all of our life choices are representative of the common goal of achieving eudaimonic well-being or eudaimonia (Akram et al., 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023). Pursuing intrinsic objectives, meeting fundamental psychological requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and experiencing self-determined motivation are characteristics of eudaimonic well-being (Akram & Li, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic or eudaimonic characteristics have historically been used to define well-being. Hedonia, by definition, is a state of well-being that promotes enjoyment of life to the fullest, steers clear of anguish and unpleasant emotional states, and feels good about oneself. Eudaimonia, on the other hand, is a behaviour pattern intended to maximize human potential; in other words, it serves as a driving force behind human behaviour aimed at fostering a "flourishing life." The latter describes a life that is full of morals, meaning, and purpose, all of which are thought to be the cornerstones of genuine happiness (VandenBos, 2015). Thus, if hedonia focuses on achieving instant pleasures & avoiding painful situations, contrastingly, eudaimonia focuses on feelings and actions which promote long-term satisfaction & helps an individual to achieve his/her full potential i.e., live a flourishing life.

As achieving eudaimonia occupies most of our life choices and is our overall well-being at a given stage of life, it is an important phenomenon to explore. By exploring eudaimonic well-being, we can develop methods to measure and increase it in people. In the current study, we shall investigate the phenomenon of eudaimonic well-being in senior citizens, the role of gender & other influencing factors & strategies to improve it. Additionally, the potential interventions of this study along with suggestions and limitations will be discussed.

Eudaimonic well-being in older adults is characterized by a sense of purpose and meaning, continued personal growth and development, and engagement in activities that contribute to a sense of fulfillment (Ryff, 2014). Currently, the number of

senior citizens in Pakistan above the age of sixty years is approximately 9 million and it has been proposed that it will increase to 42 million in 2050 (Abid et al., 2021). This rapidly increasing number of older individuals who have lived a major part of their lives and had experienced the complexities of life in this society presents a need to explore their mental health & well-being. This investigation of their eudaimonia will give a resourceful insight into the overall quality of life of Pakistani citizens.

Ryan and Deci (2000) presented a paradigm for evaluating eudaimonic well-being that assumes the existence of three universally acknowledged basic needs. It is called the Self Determination Theory (SDT). This theory identifies the following needs for eudaimonic well-being: Autonomy - the ability to make one's own life decisions; it entails feeling that one's behavior is self-endorsed and stems from personal beliefs and interests rather than being governed by external influences. In essence, autonomy is about having the freedom to make choices that align with one's own preferences, values, and goals. When individuals feel autonomous, they experience a sense of ownership over their actions, which enhances their intrinsic motivation and well-being, Competence - refers to the desire to be confident and secure in one's abilities. Competence entails feeling effective in one's relationships with the environment. It includes the need to feel capable and competent in overcoming obstacles and obtaining desired results. When people regard themselves as competent, they feel a sense of effectiveness and mastery, which boosts their intrinsic motivation and well-being, and lastly, Relatedness - the desire to have close and personal human relationships. Relatedness refers to the desire to feel linked to people and have a sense of belonging and social support. It entails developing meaningful relationships, expressing empathy, and feeling understood and cared for by others. When people feel linked to others, they get a sense of security, acceptance, and emotional support, which increases their intrinsic motivation and consequently their well-being. Relatedness is crucial for fulfilling social needs and fostering a sense of community and belongingness as we will also observe in this study.

Self Determination Theory, or SDT, says that when these requirements are satisfied, motivation and well-being are boosted, however when they are constrained, our well-being suffers (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Most psychologists agree with this paradigm, claiming that these are the most basic human needs for achieving eudaimonia, however self-esteem is also cited. Dodge et al. proposed that eudaimonic well-being refers to an individual who may reach their ultimate life objective while operating positively in their living environment.

(Dodge et al., 2012). Eudaimonic well-being is an emerging concept in psychology, which is usually used synonymously with quality of life or life satisfaction. Eudaimonic well-being and quality of life are terms that are frequently used interchangeably because they both have "objective components," or elements that are outside of an individual and measurable by "others," and subjective components, or assessments of one's own life or specific aspects of it using happiness, satisfaction, or other self-assessment scales (Campbell, 1976).

A systematic review by Javaid et al. (2024) indicates that various factors influence eudaimonic wellbeing. Positive elements such as relationships, self-acceptance, personal growth, passion, word-of-mouth behavior, intimate relationships, goal pursuit, and coping flexibility contribute positively to eudaimonic wellbeing. Conversely, psychopathy and Machiavellianism have a negative impact. The study underscores the importance of integrating eudaimonic wellbeing into mental health treatments, educational programs, and workplace wellness initiatives to enhance overall life satisfaction. These insights can be instrumental when exploring eudaimonia in senior citizens, suggesting potential avenues for improving their wellbeing.

As the eudaimonic well-being of the aging population represents the underlying issues of the quality of life of the general population in an area, it is essential to investigate it. In this study, the eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens of Faisalabad, Pakistan will be explored. The phenomenon of eudaimonic well-being has not been well-researched in both senior citizens & in Pakistan. Thus, it is important to explore the eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens of Pakistan in order to develop interventions to support the aging population while simultaneously finding methods to improve it in the overall population.

1.2. Objectives of Research

1. To find out the levels of eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens of Pakistan
2. To explore the role of gender in eudaimonic well-being
3. To look for strategies to improve the eudaimonic well-being of the population

1.1. Research Question

What is the level of eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens of Pakistan? What is role of gender and other influencing factors? Further, exploring the possible interventions to improve it.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design and Participants

The researchers used a qualitative approach to explore the eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis and purposive sampling technique are used. A total of twelve interviews were conducted. Six males and six females aged 50 – 70 years were interviewed. Senior citizens from mixed backgrounds (economic, social & personal) from Faisalabad, Punjab were included in this study. Aging citizens with severe mental illnesses were not included in this study. The participants are given codes as shown below:

TABLE 1: Assessment of Eudaimonic Well-being

No. Of Participant	Gender	Age	Eudaimonic Well-being	Codes for Participants
1	*Female*	50	Satisfactory	$f-1$
2	*Male*	66	Unsatisfactory	$m-1$
3	*Male*	64	Satisfactory	$m-2$
4	*Male*	66	Unsatisfactory	$m-3$
5	*Female*	51	Satisfactory	$f-2$
6	*Female*	60	Unsatisfactory	$f-3$
7	*Male*	81	Unsatisfactory	$m-4$
8	*Female*	58	Satisfactory	$f-4$
9	*Male*	52	Satisfactory	$m-5$
10	*Female*	54	Satisfactory	$f-5$
11	*Male*	58	Unsatisfactory	$m-6$
12	*Female*	62	Unsatisfactory	$f-6$

2.2. Procedure

Thematic analysis was used to meet the objectives of the study. Themes and subthemes were derived from the transcripts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to check the levels of eudaimonic well-being among senior citizens, the role of gender, and other influencing factors and to find strategies to increase eudaimonic well-being. Written consent was taken before the interview and the researchers asked open-ended questions from the participants. The participants were encouraged to share their lived experiences and views related to the topic. The time taken for each interview was 15 minutes. The identity and personal information of the participants are kept confidential. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were written manually. Each participant is given a specific code based on their gender.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Collected data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. This research method is used for understanding text from focus groups, transcripts of interviews, and people's responses to surveys. Thematic analysis is a research method used to identify and analyze patterns and themes in qualitative data. It helps to explore and understand the underlying meanings and concepts in a dataset. It helps in finding the main ideas and recurring topics in conversation or text. Thematic analysis has both positive and negative points. On the positive side, it provides in-depth insight into the data which cannot be represented quantitatively. However, its drawbacks are that it can be time-consuming, subjective, and biased. There are two approaches to thematic analysis, inductive and deductive. Inductive thematic analysis involves identifying themes

directly from data without any preconceived categories. Deductive thematic analysis starts with a predetermined set of themes or codes based on existing theories or literature. In this research inductive thematic analysis is used. We conducted interviews with senior citizens of Faisalabad district of Pakistan. Themes and subthemes were generated by analyzing the transcripts of interviews.

3.1. Assessment of Eudaimonic Well-being

The first theme includes the assessment of the levels of eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens. Eudaimonia in the older population is a vital concept because it has a major impact and it may provide us with a complete sense of the highest populations living among us, whether they are maturing successfully or not or in other words are they aging positively or not. While analyzing this theme, the following sub-themes emerged:

3.1.1. Satisfied Participants

Out of 12 participants of the study 6 participants were satisfied with their current well-being. The other half number of participants included in this study were dissatisfied with their overall well-being. The dissatisfied participants also showed hopelessness about their future well-being. The common factors among satisfied participants were a sense of control(autonomy), serving a purpose (competence), and having intimate relationships(relatedness) which proved the self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci given above. One of the satisfied participants, a female said:

"Main pehly bhi mutmain thi, ab bhi mutmain hoon" (*f – 2)*

3.1.2. Unsatisfied Participants

6 out of 12 participants of our research participants showed dissatisfaction with their current state of eudaimonia. They also said that their eudaimonic well-being has worsened over time. Major reasons for their dissatisfaction included the factors of self-determination theory discussed above such as lack of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They also showed poor self-esteem which can be accounted for their poor well-being. A participant expressed his well-being in the following words:

"Bachpan main khush thay lekin ab Khushi nahi hae" (*m – 1)*

3.2. Impact of Gender in Eudaimonic Well-being

One of our research objectives was to explore the correlation between gender and eudaimonic well-being. The previous studies on the correlation between gender and eudaimonic well-being have yielded inconsistent findings. Pinquart and Sorensen's (2001) meta-analysis, which included participants from a range of age categories, including adults, older adults, and adolescents, showed no statistically significant variations in psychological well-being across genders. Other researchers (Ruini et al., 2003; Kaplan et al., 2008) argued that men and women do not share the same conception of well-being. Ruini and colleagues conducted a study on an Italian sample using Ryff's psychological well-being assessment, and they discovered that Italian female participants performed worse than males in most elements of psychological well-being. Contrary to Ruini et al. (2003), Kaplan and colleagues discovered that women scored much higher on personal growth than males. In contrast, in Ryff and Keyes' (1995) research on gender differences conducted in the United States, women reported higher scores in the category of positive interpersonal relationships, but no significant differences occurred in any other facet of psychological well-being. Seeing contradicting results, we investigated the relationship between gender and eudaimonic well-being in Pakistani men and women.

In this study, although both males & females showed satisfaction with their gender, females scored higher on the levels of eudaimonia compared to males. The results are as follow:

3.2.1. Eudaimonic Well-being in Males

In this study, males showed lower levels of eudaimonic well-being compared to females. This was generally due to the lack of competence & productivity in their life as they aged & most of the unsatisfied male participants were unemployed. Another emerging factor that seemed to influence their eudaimonic well-being according to self-determination theory was failing to form close relationships i.e., relatedness. Despite these facts, males were satisfied with their gender and said it played no role in their well-being. One participant stated:

"Nai, mard hone sey mujhy kabhi koi masla nai aya" (*m – 2)*

3.2.2. Eudaimonic Well-being in Females

The eudaimonic well-being in women was higher compared to men. Although they showed satisfaction with their gender, they said that it did play a role in their eudaimonic well-being. They mentioned incidences where they faced discrimination due to their gender which impacted their well-being such as their autonomy & competence were often threatened by their male counterparts throughout their lives. A 2003 research by Ryff et al. indicated that ethnic minority status is actually a positive indication of eudaimonic well-being (Ryff et al., 2003), which may account for the higher levels of eudaimonic well-being among Pakistani females. This research implies that the obstacles of minority existence may fundamentally refine (strengthen) values such as purpose in life and personal progress, resulting in a greater sense of eudaimonia. One participant said:

"Aurat hone sey mujhy masle aye lekin meine mard ban kar zindagi guzari h" *(f – 4)*

3.3. Other Influencing Factors of Eudaimonic Well-being

Eudaimonic well-being is a broad concept & can be affected by countless factors as Carl rogers described, "the good life is a process, not a state of being" (Rogers, 1961). The current study found several other factors which contributed to the eudaimonic well-being of the senior citizens. Following are the other influencing factors which emerged while assessing eudaimonic well-being:

3.3.1. Relationships

This study found a direct relation between relationships & eudaimonic well-being. The participants with healthy & close relationships showed better levels of eudaimonic well-being than the participants who lacked this factor of relatedness. Additionally, in keeping with the earlier research, married individuals reported higher levels of good affect compared to single or widowed individuals. (Fastame et al., 2018).This investigation also supported the previous study and found that people with low eudaimonia were either divorced/widowed or never married. Children also played a significant role in the eudaimonic well-being of aging citizens. One participant expressed:

"2002 say ly kar 2013 tak koi mushkil nahi thi jab tak meri biwi hayaat thi." *(m – 3)*

3.3.2 Education

Most participants had a common regret of not getting a good education. This impacted their quality of life & in turn their eudaimonic well-being. Supporting this claim, the participants with higher education in this study showed higher levels of eudaimonic well-being. Previous research has also supported this notion, with Boniwell and Osin claiming that, unlike hedonic well-being, one's degree of education is connected with eudaimonia (Boniwell & Osin, 2012). This is because, as society has progressed, obtaining a high-quality education has become increasingly important in achieving and maintaining a respectable standard of living (Akram, 2020).

"Mein parhai main axha nai tha, lekin bad main ehsas hua kay ilam hasil karna zaruri hai"
(m – 2)

3.3.3. Society

According to Giddens (2009), a society is a collection of people who share a similar culture, values, beliefs, and institutions and interact with one another within a certain region. Some participants of the study expressed that their society had a direct impact on their well-being & they would have thrived better in a different environment/society. Although, content with their nationality they expressed the lack of opportunities and services especially for the aging population. Moreover, females showed more dissatisfaction with their society than males. This can be directly linked to the fact that patriarchy and misogyny are pervasive in the male-dominated society of Pakistan. A female participant said:

"Aj mein jesi hu is kay peche aik bari wajah meri society hei. Agar bahir hoti to mujy bohat behtar opportunities milti. *(f – 1)*

3.3.4. Work and Accomplishments

According to recent research, grit—the ability to persevere in the face of difficulty and maintain effort—predicts long-term success more accurately than IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007). Furthermore, recent research conducted in Karachi, Pakistan indicates that older persons who have the opportunity to work above the age of 60 have a higher quality of life since they are no longer reliant on others and may have happy, fulfilling lives (Cassum et al., 2020). This study also supported the previous findings that participants felt the highest level of eudaimonia when they were working & it is true for both males

& females as they felt a sense of competence & autonomy while working. One participant said:
"Jab me kam karta tha tab me apne ap ko content mehsus karta tha mujhe aisa mehsus hota tha ky mujhy apni zindagi ka maqsad hasil ho gya hai" *(m – 5)*.

3.3.5. Fulfilling Responsibilities
Fulfilling responsibilities also showed a correlation with eudaimonic well-being. Participants who have fulfilled their responsibilities as parents, partners & citizens had a greater sense of well-being. This stood especially true in the case of parents & children. The participants who did not properly fulfill their responsibilities as parents were far less satisfied than the participants who did so. A quote from the interview:
"Jab mene apni akhiri beti ki shadi ki to mujhe kamyabi ka ihsas hua or meine apne ap ko mazbut mehsus kiya." *(m – 6)*.

3.3.6. Learning New Things
Most of the participants in this research showed a disinterest in exploring & learning new things. They had a common opinion that they had explored enough & why should they learn new things at this stage of life? To answer their question on the purpose of continuous learning, life span theories by Erikson and Neugarten explained the importance of confronting new challenges and tasks at different stages of life for positive aging (Erikson & Neugarten). A participant stated:
"Ab is umer mein or kiya sikhna hai, dil hi nai karta. Kafi hai yehi sab bs." *(f – 3)*

4. Strategies to Increase Eudaimonic Wellbeing
The participants of this research as well as previous research give us some insights on the strategies that can improve eudaimonic well-being. These are discussed below:

4.1. Focus on Religion and Spirituality
Ethics, according to Ogbonna and Ebimobowei (2011), is expressed in the values that a person upholds to guide his or her behavior as well as in the standards that they employ to determine what is right and wrong. According to Elegido (2000), "Muslims are obligated by ethics to lead moral lives". As the participants included in this study are Muslims, Islam played a major role in their levels of eudaimonic well-being. Islam with its teachings focuses heavily on eternal optimism, Thus, the participants who were more religiously practicing showed better eudaimonia. Moreover, they also advised the younger generation to connect more with religion & spirituality.
"Allah pe yakeen rakho, Allah ne jo tumhare liye pasand kiya hai yehi tumhare liye behtar hai, isi sey hame zehni sakoon milta ha." *(f – 6)*.

4.2. Focus on Education
With the progression of society, it has become essential to get an education not only to meet life necessities but also to reach self-actualization (Akram & Yang, 2021). The life-span theories by Erikson and Neugarten describe the importance of environmental mastery, the art of manipulating the environment to fit one's outer and inner worlds. Education is a key component of environmental mastery. A participant advised on education in the following words:
"Apni studies pe focus karo. Is se ap mazbut ho gy or mushkil waqt mein independent ho sakty ho" *(m – 2)*.

4.3. Engage in Self-Reflection
Another recurrent advice given by the participants of this study was to engage more in self-reflection than focusing on the actions of others. Aligning with this advice, Seligman also stated that 40% of our happiness is in our voluntary control (how we choose to engage in the environment) (Seligman, 2002). As introspection (analyzing oneself) has been a proven technique in psychology, it apparently also improves one's level of eudaimonia. A participant advised:
"Apne upper focus kare khud ko behtar banane ki koshish karein, jab ap khud content feel karty hain tab dusron kai actions zyada affect nai krty". *(f – 1)*

4.4. Be Independent
Work and achievements have a big influence on wellbeing, as was previously mentioned. As a result, independence is a significant determinant of eudaimonic well-being. The study participants highly recommended independence and not reliance on others to meet fundamental requirements. Additionally, the people who earned their own money had higher eudaimonia scores. Being dependent on others showed an impact on an aging person's autonomy and competence. An earlier study backs up this assertion. According to Martin, proximal elements that positively influence optimum

aging include extrinsic ones, such as income (Martin, 2002). A study participant stated:
"Apne liye khud koshish kare kisi ki madad ke bagair khud apne hak ke liye awaz uthayein." *(f – 3)*

5. Conclusion

The eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens is the representative of a nation's quality of life. It is important to explore this topic. The main objectives of the current study are to assess the levels of eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens of Pakistan, the impact of gender and other influencing factors. Also, to find the interventions to improve the eudaimonic well-being of the overall population. For this study, qualitative analysis was processed through thematic analysis. Data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Themes and sub-themes were derived from the transcripts manually. It is concluded that the levels of the eudaimonic well-being of senior citizens of Faisalabad Pakistan are on the lower side. The impact of gender on eudaimonic well-being is slight but present. Also, certain strategies emerged which can be used to enhance the eudaimonic well-being of aging population as well as the general population.

6. Implications of Eudaimonic Well-being

After conducting the current study, the researchers derived certain implications of the findings of the research. These are discussed below:

6.1. Clinical and Personal Implications

A notable example is "well-being therapy," which specifically uses eudaimonic well-being (Fava, 1999; Fava et al., 1998). The main objective of this treatment approach, which was developed as an adjunct to cognitive behavioral therapy for treating serious depression, is to encourage patients to have pleasant psychological experiences in order to stave off relapses. The intervention entails keeping a daily journal of happy events. These diaries are then used as the main focus of therapy, teaching patients how to link happy experiences to relevant dimensions in the Ryff model of well-being, enhance awareness of these experiences, and—most importantly—avoid prematurely curtailing them. Early results demonstrated that patients receiving well-being therapy had improved remission profiles and long-term monitoring added to the evidence by demonstrating that relapse was avoided over a six-year period (Fava et al., 2004). Additionally, it has been discovered that well-being therapy has long-lasting benefits in the treatment of anxiety disorders (Fava et al. 2005; Ruini et al., 2015). In older persons, "life satisfaction and an increase in depressive symptoms" are negatively impacted by a lack of social support (Newsom & Schulz, 1996). To assist seniors in changing their perspective and concentrating on the positive parts of their lives, therapists may employ strategies such as these as well as cognitive behavioral therapy or positive psychology therapies.

6.3. Social Implications

On the other end of the life course, Lighten Up! a community initiative, has shown interest in promoting eudaimonia among elderly persons (Friedman et al., 2015). Many difficulties that come with growing older, such as losing important people, positions in life, and health crises, might make one more susceptible to depression. This eight-week program includes sharing happy memories, discussing the value of well-being in later life, and participating in activities that help people cope with challenging situations and achieve eudaimonia. The first pilot study's pre-post comparisons revealed improvements in the majority of eudaimonic well-being and life satisfaction in addition to decreases in depressive and physical symptoms as well as sleeping complaints. These gains were more noticeable in those with less eudaimonic well-being before the intervention. Additionally, this program can be used in the social settings of multiple communities.

6.4. Policy Implications

Implement initiatives to help older persons form social relationships and support networks. Factors such as perceived bad financial status, depression, functional constraints caused by long-term disease, and limitations in daily activities can all have a detrimental impact on quality of life. (Netuveli et al., 2006). Ensuring inexpensive and accessible healthcare services, such as preventative care, mental health assistance, and geriatric care, can improve seniors' overall well-being. Designing towns and communities with elements like accessible transit and welcoming streets may encourage active aging. By implementing these policy options, the government and communities may increase enrollment and promote eudaimonic well-being in seniors.

7. Limitations and Suggestions

This study was only limited to the senior citizens of Faisalabad. The study only displays the eudaimonic well-being among senior citizens in a specific region. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized over the broader population in Pakistan. Moreover, this study is limited to a specific age group. The overall sample of the study was small. Another limitation is that only binary genders: male and female are included.

For future studies, older adults from different geographical regions nationwide and worldwide can be added. Moreover, transgender and non-binary people can also be included. Future research can also be done on assessing the eudaimonic well-being of other age groups such as adolescents and young adults.

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