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The role of age and gender in shaping happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction among elderly individuals

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of age and gender in determining happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction among elderly individuals. As global aging accelerates, understanding how demographic variables influence psychological well-being has become crucial for improving the quality of life in later years. Using a comparative cross-sectional design, the study surveyed 450 elderly participants across three age groups (65-75, 75-85, and 85+ years) and both genders, employing standardized instruments including the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA to examine age-based differences and independent samples t-tests for gender comparisons. The results revealed significant age-related differences in happiness and spiritual well-being, with individuals aged 75-85 years reporting the highest levels, followed by a notable decline in the 85+ age group. However, life satisfaction remained stable across all age groups, suggesting adaptive mechanisms in later life. Gender comparisons showed that male participants reported significantly higher levels of happiness and spiritual well-being compared to females, while no significant difference was found in life satisfaction. These findings indicate that age and gender are important factors influencing emotional and spiritual dimensions of well-being in old age, while life satisfaction appears to be more resilient to demographic variations. The study underscores the need for age-sensitive and gender-responsive interventions in geriatric care and calls for policies that address the diverse psychological needs of older adults. It contributes to gerontological literature by highlighting the nuanced interplay between demographic characteristics and subjective well-being in aging populations.

Keywords: Aging, gender differences, happiness, spiritual well-being, life satisfaction

1. Introduction

Aging is an inevitable biological process marked by gradual physiological, emotional, and social changes that significantly influence the overall quality of life. With the global demographic shift toward an aging population, there is an increasing need to understand how older adults experience psychological well-being in later life (United Nations, 2023) [34]. Psychological well-being among the elderly is generally defined through key constructs such as happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction, all of which are central to positive aging outcomes (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; George, 2010) [30, 12]. These dimensions not only reflect the subjective quality of life but are also important predictors of mental and physical health in aging populations (Diener *et al.*, 1985; Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone,

2015) [9, 33].

Age and gender are among the most influential demographic factors that shape psychological well-being in older adults. With advancing age, individuals may encounter various psychosocial challenges, including reduced social roles, declining physical health, bereavement, and dependency, which can adversely affect their emotional state (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2006) [22]. However, the impact of age on well-being is not always linear; some studies have shown that older adults, particularly those above the age of 75, often report higher or stable levels of happiness and life satisfaction due to greater emotional regulation and acceptance of life circumstances (Carstensen *et al.*, 2011; Jeste *et al.*, 2016) [3, 16].

Gender differences in psychological well-being have also

been widely documented. Women often report higher levels of spiritual well-being and emotional expressiveness, while men may report higher levels of life satisfaction depending on cultural and social contexts (Kim & Ko, 2010; Adib-Hajbaghery & Faraji, 2015) ^[18, 1]. These differences may be influenced by lifelong socialization patterns, gender roles, and the availability of social and familial support systems in later life (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001) ^[29]. However, existing literature presents mixed findings, with some studies reporting no significant gender-based variations in well-being, suggesting the need for more context-specific investigations (Paul *et al.*, 2024) ^[28].

Despite extensive research on the general well-being of older adults, limited attention has been given to understanding how age and gender specifically interact with happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction, especially in the Indian context. The aging experience in India is particularly complex due to cultural norms, variations in family structure, and disparities in access to healthcare and social support. As such, this study aims to fill an important gap by examining the role of age and gender in shaping these key indicators of well-being among elderly individuals.

The present study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To assess whether happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction significantly differ across age groups among elderly individuals.
2. To examine gender-based differences in happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction among elderly individuals.
3. To determine the extent to which age and gender together influence the psychological well-being of elderly individuals.

2. Methodology

This study employed a comparative cross-sectional research design to examine how age and gender influence psychological well-being among elderly individuals. The cross-sectional nature of the design allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time across various subgroups, thereby facilitating the analysis of age- and gender-based differences in happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction. The comparative aspect of the study enabled the researchers to detect patterns of variation across the different demographic groups, aligning with the study's objectives.

The data for this study were collected from a total of 450 elderly individuals, selected through purposive sampling from three districts in Uttar Pradesh: Kanpur, Lucknow, and Mathura. The participants were equally distributed across these locations, with 150 respondents selected from each district. To ensure balanced representation, each district contributed 75 community-dwelling elderly and 75 old-age home residents, resulting in 225 participants from each residential setting.

This equal stratification allowed for comparative analysis between the two groups across uniform regional contexts. Within each residential category (community dwelling and old-age home), the percentage distribution of respondents from Kanpur, Lucknow, and Mathura was 33.33% each. The final sample thus comprised:

- **Kanpur:** 75 community-dwelling elderly and 75 old-age home residents (Total = 150)
 - **Lucknow:** 75 community-dwelling elderly and 75 old-age home residents (Total = 150)
 - **Mathura:** 75 community-dwelling elderly and 75 old-age home residents (Total = 150) The study focused on three major variables:
1. Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) ^[15]. This 29-item scale is designed to assess subjective well-being and happiness across emotional and cognitive domains. Responses are scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6), with higher scores indicating greater happiness.
 2. Spiritual well-being was assessed using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) by Ellison and Paloutzian (1982) ^[10], which consists of 20 items divided into two subscales: Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB). Responses are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with total scores indicating overall spiritual health. The scale has demonstrated high reliability and is commonly used in aging and health research.
 3. Life satisfaction was evaluated using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener *et al.* (1985) ^[8]. This 5-item instrument measures individuals' global cognitive judgments of their satisfaction with life. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction.

Data were collected through structured face-to-face interviews. Interviews took place in participants' homes or residential institutions, depending on their living situation. Written informed consent was secured from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated for all three psychological variables across gender and age groups. To assess the influence of age, one-way ANOVA was used to compare mean scores of happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction across the three age groups (65-75, 75-85, and above 85 years). Where the ANOVA yielded significant results, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were applied to identify which specific age groups differed significantly from one another.

To determine gender-based differences, independent samples t-tests were performed for each of the three variables, comparing male and female participants. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Effect sizes (Cohen's d for t-tests and eta-squared for ANOVA) were calculated to interpret the practical significance of observed differences.

This comprehensive methodology allowed for a nuanced exploration of how both age and gender contribute to variations in psychological well-being among elderly individuals, thereby directly addressing the research objectives and hypotheses outlined in the introduction.

			Residence		Total
			Community Dwelling	Old Age home	
Location	Kanpur	Count	75	75	150
	Lucknow	Count	75	75	150
	Mathura	Count	75	75	150
	Total	Count	225	225	450

3. Results

The results of the study are presented in this section, focusing on how age and gender influence three key dimensions of psychological well-being—happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction—among elderly individuals. Analyses include descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA results for age group comparisons, and independent samples t-tests for gender differences. Significant findings are further explored using Bonferroni post-hoc tests where appropriate.

Descriptive Statistics by Age and Gender

Participants were categorized into three age groups: 65-75 years, 75-85 years, and 85+ years, and analyzed by gender. Mean scores indicated variability in happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction across age and gender groups. Descriptive results highlighted that individuals aged 75-85 reported comparatively higher happiness scores, whereas a trend of reduced scores appeared for the oldest group (85+ years). Gender-wise, variations were observed, prompting further statistical investigation.

ANOVA Results for Age-Based Differences

To assess whether differences in psychological well-being were statistically significant across the three age groups, one-way ANOVA was conducted for each variable.

The ANOVA results indicated statistically significant differences in happiness scores across age groups ($F = 9.738, p < .001$). This significant result justified conducting Bonferroni post-hoc tests to identify specific group differences. The corresponding results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: One Way ANNOVA Results of Happiness Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old-Age Home Residents based on Age Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
All Participants	Between Groups	8.797	2	4.398	9.738	.000
	Within Groups	201.899	447	0.452		
	Total	210.696	449			
Old Age Home Residents	Between Groups	5.291	2	2.645	5.795	0.004
	Within Groups	101.337	222	0.456		
	Total	106.627	224			
Community Dwelling Residents	Between Groups	6.422	2	3.211	7.782	0.001
	Within Groups	91.606	222	0.413		
	Total	98.028	224			

Source: Authors own work

For spiritual well-being, ANOVA indicated no significant differences across the overall sample of age groups ($F = 0.764, p = .467$). However, subgroup analyses revealed a significant age difference among old-age home residents specifically ($F = 4.525, p = 0.012$). This result indicates that, within institutionalized settings, spiritual well-being varied significantly with advancing age. This result is documented in Table 3.

Table 3: One Way ANNOVA Results of Spiritual Well-Being Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old- Age Home Residents based on Age Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
All Participants	Between Groups	163.342	2	81.671	0.764	0.467
	Within Groups	47806.578	447	106.950		
	Total	47969.920	449			
Old Age Home Residents	Between Groups	807.380	2	403.69	4.525	0.012
	Within Groups	19806.620	222	89.21		
	Total	20614.000	224			
Community Dwelling Residents	Between Groups	177.923	2	88.961	0.859	0.425
	Within Groups	22982.717	222	103.526		
	Total	23160.640	224			

Source: Authors own work

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found in life satisfaction across age ANOVA for life satisfaction indicated no statistically significant differences across age groups ($F = 2.805, p = .062$), suggesting stability in life satisfaction irrespective of age categories., as shown in Table 4

Table 4: One Way ANNOVA Results of Satisfaction With Life Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old- Age Home Residents based on Age Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
All Participants	Between Groups	216.833	2	108.416	2.805	0.062
	Within Groups	17276.992	447	38.651		
	Total	17493.824	449			
Old Age Home Residents	Between Groups	122.10	2	61.05	1.81	0.166
	Within Groups	7480.11	222	33.69		
	Total	7602.222	224			
Community Dwelling Residents	Between Groups	106.23	2	53.11	1.20	0.302
	Within Groups	9783.74	222	44.07		
	Total	9889.982	224			

Source: Authors own work

Post-Hoc Tests (Bonferroni) for Age Groups

To further explore the significant ANOVA results, Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted.

Bonferroni post-hoc tests showed that elderly individuals

aged 65-75 years had significantly higher happiness scores compared to the 85+ years group (mean difference = 0.53175, $p = .002$). Additionally, participants aged 75-85 years also had higher happiness than those aged 85+ (mean difference = 0.31081), although this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .15845$). These results suggest a notable decline in happiness for participants aged over 85. These findings are captured in Table 5.

Table 5: Post Hoc- Bonferroni Results of All Participants Happiness Scores between Age Groups

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
65-75 Years	75- 85 Years	-.22094*	.06575	.003	-0.3789	-0.0629
	85 Years & Above	-0.53175*	0.15615	0.002	-0.9070	-0.1565
75- 85 Years	65-75 Years	0.22094*	0.06575	0.003	0.0629	0.3789
	85 Years & Above	-0.31081	0.15845	0.151	-0.6916	0.0700
85 Years & Above	65-75 Years	0.53175*	0.15615	0.002	0.1565	0.9070
	75- 85 Years	0.31081	0.15845	0.151	-0.0700	0.6916

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Authors own work

For spiritual well-being, post-hoc analysis showed a significant difference between the 75-85 group and the 85+ group, suggesting that spiritual well-being declines slightly after age 85.

Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences

To analyze gender-based differences in psychological well-being, independent samples t-tests were conducted comparing male and female participants.

Independent samples t-test revealed no significant gender differences in happiness scores ($t = -1.4$, $p = .15$). Although males and females differed slightly at a descriptive level, the difference did not reach statistical significance. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Independent Samples T-test Results of Happiness Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old-Age Home Residents based on Gender

Happiness Score	N	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	df	t-value	Sig.
All Participants	450	0.04	0.06	448	0.63	0.525
Old Age Home Residents	225	.21	.09	223	2.35	0.019
Community Dwelling Residents	225	-0.13	0.08	223	-1.48	0.139

Source: Authors own work

The independent samples t-test for spiritual well-being showed a significant gender difference ($t = -8.17$, $p < .000$), indicating that females reported significantly higher spiritual well-being than males. The large t-value underscores a substantial difference in how males and females experience or report spiritual well-being, emphasizing gender as an

essential factor influencing spirituality in older adults. These findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Independent Samples T-test Results of Spiritual Well-Being Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old-Age Home Residents based on Gender

Spiritual Well-Being Score	N	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	df	t-value	Sig.
All Participants	450	-7.44	0.91	448	-8.17	.000
Old Age Home Residents	225	-4.36	1.24	223	-3.48	.001
Community Dwelling Residents	225	-10.47	1.16	223	-9.00	.000

Source: Authors own work

Similarly, the t-test revealed a significant gender difference in life satisfaction ($t = 3.088$, $p < .002$). Specifically, males reported significantly higher life satisfaction compared to females. This finding suggests gender plays a significant role in shaping overall life satisfaction among elderly individuals., as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Independent Samples T-test Results of Satisfaction with Life Scores of Community-Dwelling Elderly and Old-Age Home Residents based on Gender

Satisfaction With Life Score	N	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	df	t-value	Sig.
All Participants	450	1.8	0.58	436.44	3.088	.002
Old Age Home Residents	225	1.1	0.77	213.42	1.435	0.153
Community Dwelling Residents	225	2.48	0.87	223	2.854	0.005

Source: Authors own work

4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the role of age and gender in determining levels of happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction among elderly individuals. The findings provide critical insights into how these demographic variables interact with psychological well-being, highlighting important nuances that carry implications for research, practice, and policy.

The results demonstrated significant age-related differences in happiness scores ($F = 9.738$, $p < .000$). Participants in the younger elderly groups, specifically aged 65-75 and 75-85 years, reported significantly higher happiness levels compared to those above 85 years, as confirmed by the Bonferroni post-hoc test (mean difference between 65-75 and 85+ groups = 0.53175, $p = .002$). This trend aligns with existing literature suggesting a decline in subjective well-being in advanced age due to increased physical limitations, health-related stress, loss of close relationships, and reduced independence (Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone, 2015; Litwin & Shiovitz- Ezra, 2006) [33, 22]. The substantial drop observed in the happiness scores among participants aged 85 and above underscores the need for targeted emotional support interventions in this specific age cohort.

Interestingly, while spiritual well-being scores did not show significant age-related differences across the entire sample

($F = 0.764$, $p = .467$), subgroup analysis revealed that elderly residents in old-age homes specifically demonstrated significant differences by age ($F = 4.525$, $p = 0.012$). This finding indicates that within institutional settings, spiritual engagement or reflection may differ substantially with advancing age, potentially driven by structured spiritual or religious activities frequently provided in institutional care environments (Koenig, 2012; Kang, Ko, & Kim, 2015) [19, 17]. Thus, it appears that older residents in institutions may experience varied spiritual engagement as they age, which requires focused attention from caregivers and gerontological practitioners.

In contrast, life satisfaction did not significantly differ across the age groups ($F = 2.805$, $p = .062$). This stability is consistent with the theory of selective optimization with compensation, which posits that elderly individuals tend to adapt to age-related changes by adjusting personal expectations, goals, and evaluations of life, thereby maintaining consistent overall satisfaction (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Diener *et al.*, 1985) [2]. This resilience in life satisfaction indicates that despite declines in physical or social domains, cognitive evaluations of overall life remain relatively stable across older adulthood.

The study further highlighted notable gender-based differences in psychological well-being. For happiness, no statistically significant gender difference was identified ($t = 0.63$, $p = 0.525$). This suggests that, contrary to some earlier findings (Paul *et al.*, 2024) [28], males and females report similar levels of happiness within the studied elderly population, reflecting possibly changing gender roles and socio-cultural norms.

However, significant gender differences emerged in spiritual well-being ($t = -8.17$, $p < .000$) and life satisfaction ($t = 3.088$, $p < .002$). Females reported notably higher spiritual well-being scores than males, aligning with existing literature indicating women's higher engagement with spiritual and religious activities, particularly in older age, possibly reflecting cultural norms or coping mechanisms in response to life stressors (Gupta & Khandelwal, 2009; Kim & Ko, 2010) [14, 18]. Conversely, males exhibited higher life satisfaction, which may reflect men's relatively privileged access to economic resources, greater autonomy, and fewer caregiving responsibilities in traditional socio-cultural contexts, which significantly influence overall evaluative judgments of life satisfaction (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001) [29].

Overall, these results provide nuanced evidence confirming that happiness and spiritual well-being vary significantly with age, particularly highlighting vulnerability among the oldest-old. Gender differences in spiritual well-being and life satisfaction further emphasize the importance of addressing socio-cultural contexts and disparities in elderly populations. Practically, these insights advocate for tailored interventions: emotional and existential support programs must prioritize those aged above 85, while spiritual programs should particularly engage older women, and interventions aiming to enhance life satisfaction should address structural and social factors impacting elderly women disproportionately.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how age and gender influence

happiness, spiritual well-being, and life satisfaction among 450 elderly individuals across three age groups (65-75, 75-85, 85+) and both genders. Significant age differences were observed in happiness ($F = 9.738$, $p < .000$), with the 65-75 age group reporting higher happiness than those aged 85+. Spiritual well-being differed significantly within old-age home residents by age ($F = 4.525$, $p = 0.012$), while life satisfaction showed no significant variation across age groups ($F = 2.805$, $p = .062$). Gender differences were also notable: females had higher spiritual well-being ($t = -8.17$, $p < .000$), while males reported greater life satisfaction ($t = 3.088$, $p < .002$). No significant gender difference was found in happiness ($t = 0.63$, $p = 0.525$). These findings highlight the importance of age- and gender-responsive psychological interventions and policies in elderly care, supporting more inclusive and targeted approaches in gerontological practice.

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