

ACHIEVEMENT OF LIFE PURPOSE AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AMONG ELDERLY (50+) IN SLOVENIA

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Introduction

Subjective well-being, happiness and satisfaction with life are increasingly commonly used as indicators of quality of life both on individual and societal level. When comparing different age groups, old people are usually most satisfied with their lives but show only intermediate levels of happiness (George, 2010). One of the objectives of our research was to determine what makes old people satisfied but not happy especially in relation to the achievement of life purpose, feelings of regret, experience of negative emotions and general physical and mental health.

Method

We interviewed a total of 1047 participants in a representative sample of Slovenians aged 50+. 41.3% of them were men and 58.7% women. The average age of the participants was 66.9 years (SD=10.5). The youngest participant was 50.3 and the oldest 98.2 years old.

A complex questionnaire **The standpoints, needs and potentials of Slovenian population aged 50+** was administered as a personal in-home survey with a specially trained interviewer. It contained both quantitative and qualitative questions on a wide selection of topics among them happiness, satisfaction, achievement of life purpose, health and the experience of negative emotions.

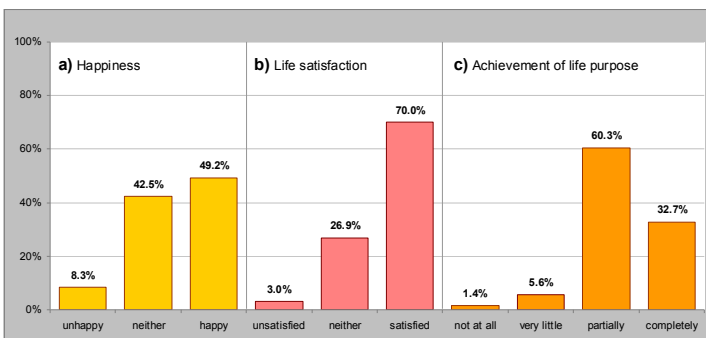


FIGURE 1. Happiness, life satisfaction and the achievement of life purpose in the 50+ population in Slovenia.

Results

A relatively high percentage of the sample declare themselves as satisfied with their lives (70.0%), while in comparison only 49.2% are happy (Figure 1). 44.3% of the total population are both satisfied and happy, while 25.7% are satisfied but not particularly happy.

Subjective well-being among elderly Slovenes is therefore higher on a cognitive (satisfaction) level when compared with a more emotional (happiness) level.

We compared the **satisfied-happy** group with the **satisfied-not happy** group on measures of the achievement of life purpose, feelings of regret and the experience of negative emotions.

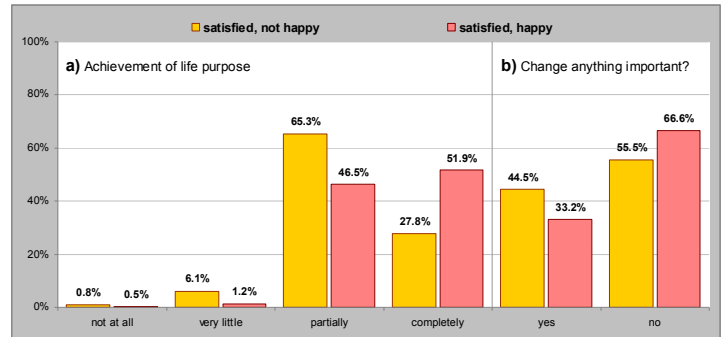


FIGURE 2. Achievement of life purpose and the wish to change if it was possible to live life again: comparison of the groups of **satisfied-not happy** and **satisfied-happy** participants.

There is a significant difference between the groups in the achievement of life purpose ($t(488.961)=6.545$; $p<0.01$). About half of those who are satisfied and happy claim to have achieved their life purpose completely, while the majority of satisfied-not happy participants achieved their life purpose only partially (Figure 2, part a).

Similarly, there is a significant difference between the two groups on the question whether they would change anything important if they lived their life again ($t(509.193)=2.985$; $p<0.01$). 44.5% of the satisfied-not happy group answered affirmatively, compared with 33.2% in the satisfied-happy group (Figure 2, part b).

Additionally, satisfied-non happy participants experience more loneliness, anxiety, unease, sadness and meaninglessness. There is also a small difference in their subjective assessments of mental and general health, where the satisfied-happy participants generally feel healthier.

Conclusions

Quality of life in old age demands the maintenance of life meaning and protection against social isolation, anxiety, sadness and feelings of pointlessness.

Well-being among elderly people in Slovenia is more pronounced on the cognitive (life satisfaction) as on the emotional (happiness) level.

Satisfied-non happy participants are more likely to have only partially achieved their life purpose and experience more regret, health problems and negative emotions compared with the satisfied-happy group.

KEY REFERENCES

George Linda K. (2010). Still happy after all these years: research frontiers on subjective well-being in later life. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 65B (3), 331-339.

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