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Defense Styles and Life Satisfaction of the Elderly in Tabriz: Examination and Analysis

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Abstract
The purpose of the current study is to examine the relationship between defense styles and the life satisfaction of the elderly in Tabriz. The current research is an applied study that employs a descriptive-correlational design for its purposes. The statistical population of the research consists of elderly people of Tabriz with an age of 60 years or higher, the count of which was determined by the official statistics to stand at a figure of 82,159. 80 people were decided to make up the statistical sample of the present study, for which a stratified random sampling method was used, that is, first, the municipal areas of Tabriz city were determined, then elder people were randomly sampled from each area based on the elderly population of that particular area. The life satisfaction of the elderly was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI; Neugarten and Havighurst, 1961), while the defense styles were measured by the DSQ-40 (Andrews et al., 1993). The acquired data was analyzed in the SPSS software environment. The findings of the study indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between the neurotic defensive style and the life satisfaction of the elderly in Tabriz city.

Keywords: *Defense styles, life satisfaction, social interaction, Elderly people*

Introduction

The ever-rising figure of elderly people all around the globe has been deemed by many to be among the most concerning challenges the field of health and life satisfaction is yet to

address. Official statistics reveal that the population of people aged 60 and over was about six hundred million people in 2000, and is projected to reach up to one billion two hundred million people in 2025 and up to two billion people in 2050 (Yazdini et al., 2015). According to United Nations estimates, countries where the proportion of elderly population is 7% or more are classified as aging countries, thus making Iran one such country, with an elderly population equal to 8.2% of the country's total population. Developed countries of the modern world seek to establish a positive view of aging, in that the life of the elderly should be accompanied by health, security, and satisfaction with life (Nabavi, 2014). Therefore, a major point of interest for the researchers studying the elderly is their life satisfaction, which is perceived as to reflect the balance between one's aspirations and current situation. It is, as such, considered a cognitive component of mental well-being. The results of various studies indicate that the level of life satisfaction (mental well-being) of the elderly does not decrease with age, despite the decline in cognitive, social, and physical abilities, which is termed the "aging paradox" (Moradi et al., 2011). Moreover, evidence from the literature shows that the life satisfaction of the elderly can be influenced by variables such as social support, physical health status, sources of control (internal, external, luck), mental factors, financial support, and life events (Sadegh Moghadam, 2015).

Mattson et al. (2006) define life satisfaction as the attitude that an individual holds about life, which can be a reflection of a person's feelings about his past, present, or future. Elderly people with higher life satisfaction usually exhibit behaviors that promote physical and mental health (Offer, 2000). Unlike the 20th century, the main challenge of the current century is not to just survive, but to live with better quality and higher life satisfaction, and since evidence from research suggests that mental and emotional problems are the number-one cause of decrease in life satisfaction of the elderly (Michalos & Orlando, 2006), therefore, examining the mental health of the elderly and the required measures to improve their life satisfaction is a major issue that should be addressed more sensibly (Parhoun et al., 2013).

Life satisfaction in elderly people has been found to have a direct relationship with their level of social interaction. Many of them have not left relationships and have maintained previous relationships and activities or enjoy new relationships and activities. Aging mothers regain their social momentum in their new role of grandmother and hence become spirited. Men turn to new hobbies and professions for themselves that maintain or elevate their position in society. Some even get married after the age of 80 and are satisfied therewith (Davis, 2007).

The findings of the literature suggest the possibility of a relationship between variables related to life satisfaction and defense styles of people (Gharibi et al., 2016), the verification of which, however, requires further studies. Defense mechanisms are processes in the personality structure that affect psychological adjustment (Vailnat, 2003). Freud considered the personal defense style, i.e., the frequency of using different defense mechanisms, compared to others, to be the main variable for recognizing personality, pathology, and the degree of compromise. Defense mechanisms are instruments that the subconscious human mind employs to deal with failure and discomfort. It represents an evolving adaptive method that people resort to when seeking to prevent the weakening of

their self-esteem. Freud defines defense mechanisms as those subconscious measures that an individual employs to resolve negative emotions. These emotion-oriented measures do not alter the dynamics of the stressful situation, but only change the way a person perceives or thinks thereabout. It is safe to argue, hence, that there is a hint of self-deception in all defense mechanisms (Atkinson et al, 2000). Since people's defense mechanisms affect the quality and nature of their reactions to different situations, examining the correlation between defense mechanisms and life satisfaction, which play a key role in the psycho-social health of the elderly, is of paramount significance.

Defense mechanisms are automated psychological responses that support people against anxiety, perceptive danger, or stressful events and pose a mediating role between the reaction against emotional conflicts and internal and external stress factors. Conceptually and practically, defense mechanisms are divided into different groups that correspond to the level of defensive activity (DSM-IV-TR, 2000), which leads to the stabilization of specific personality traits and habits. Although each person uses a system of defense mechanisms, in each personality disorder, a subset of mechanisms prevails over other mechanisms (King, 1991) and through these mechanisms, psychodynamic specialists can determine the type of pathology someone might have (Lucas, 2003). The proper use of defense mechanisms is a way of maintaining mental health.

Freud assigns the notion of defense mechanisms to those subconscious measures that an individual employs to resolve negative emotions. These emotion-oriented measures do not alter the dynamics of the stressful situation, but only change the way a person perceives or thinks thereabout. It is safe to argue, hence, that there is a hint of self-deception in all defense mechanisms. We humans all use defense mechanisms from time to time, as we defuse difficult situations through them so that we can resolve the stressful situation more directly. The use of defense mechanisms indicates incompatibility only if it becomes the main way of responding to adversities and difficulties. One of the differences between the defense mechanisms and the coping measures is that the defense mechanisms are highly subconscious processes while coping measures are often exhibited intentionally. However, some unconscious defense mechanisms in an extreme form can lead a person to consciously use non-adaptive countermeasures.

Many studies indicate that the more social ties and contact a person has (that is, spouse, friends, relatives, and family members), the longer his/her life will be and the less he/she will suffer from stress-related diseases. People can receive from friends and loved ones many ways. Receiving unconditional love, that is, regardless of the type of problems and personal issues one might have, leads to higher levels of self-esteem. Giving information and guidance to a person, freeing his/her mind from worries, or providing financial and material assistance is also among these supports. These supports all reduce the feeling of helplessness and reinforce confidence in the capability to solve the problem. It is easier to bear mental pressure when it is perceived to be affecting others. In social calamities such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, or wars, people usually act on their best behavior, as in such situations, people join hands to overcome the troubles. When people work together against a

common enemy or towards a common goal, personal concerns and conflicts are overlooked. However, family and friends can cause a person's tension to escalate. Underestimating a dangerous situation or blindly reassuring that everything will be fine may be worse than can make a person more anxious (Kachoui et al., 2012).

Moradi Kord-Mahale (2015) conducted a study to compare the quality of life, life satisfaction, and defense styles in people with a history of cosmetic surgery and normal people, the findings from which revealed that the quality of life and defense styles of people with a history of cosmetic surgery are different from those of normal people, but the life satisfaction of these two groups is not significantly different. People with a history of cosmetic surgery scored lower than normal people at the psychological sub-scale of quality of life and scored higher at the subscale of the environment and living conditions of quality of life. People with a history of cosmetic surgery exhibited more immature and mature defense styles than normal people. The results also showed that there is a significant relationship between defense styles and life satisfaction. Since people with a history of cosmetic surgery are vulnerable at the psychological level of quality of life and use more defense mechanisms, it is better to have psychological counseling before cosmetic surgery.

Gharibi et al. (2016) conducted a study to examine the predictability of defense mechanisms based on perceived quality of life and social-emotional support in married women. The results of regression analysis showed that, among all components of quality of life, two components of mental health and social performance provide the strongest beta coefficient of 0.34 and 0.25 respectively to explain the criterion variable (defense mechanism). Also, among the components of perceived social-emotional support, only the family component (0.16) was able to predict the criterion variable of defense mechanisms. Javaheri et al. (2010) examined in their study the relationship between defense mechanisms and experience and expression of anger in female students. Individuals who employ mature defense mechanisms can experience their emotions, including anger, and can hence leash their anger more effectively, but people who use immature and neurotic defense mechanisms avoid experiencing feelings, and the ignored feeling is projected in the form of behaviors that are sometimes beyond their control. Therefore, people should be trained to use mature defense mechanisms.

Boulter (1995) examined the main personality traits involved in life satisfaction among married students, which was conducted by examining 158 married Iranian students in Malaysia, the findings indicated that traits such as self-confidence, extroversion, and flexibility have a significant positive effect on life satisfaction. Bozorpour and Salimi (2012) examined the effects of self-esteem, and loneliness on life satisfaction, using a sample of 163 girls and 50 boys, and reported that self-esteem is a stronger positive predictor and emotional loneliness is a stronger negative predictor for life satisfaction. Batley (2012) studied the role of flexibility and perceived stress in predicting life satisfaction in successful and unsuccessful students using a sample of 120 students and concluded that flexibility and positive perceived stress have a positive relationship with life satisfaction in successful and unsuccessful

students. Also, negative perceived stress exhibited a negative relationship with the life satisfaction of both the successful and unsuccessful students.

Arslan, Hamota, and Aslow (2010) reported that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction. Bozorgmehr and Salimi (2012) concluded that emotional loneliness is a strong negative predictor of life satisfaction. Rezapour et al. (2010) showed that religiosity affects life satisfaction through its effect on anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, and social behavior. Malik (2011) argued that personality traits and coping styles play an important role in explaining mental well-being. Neuroticism is a negative predictor and extroversion and conscientiousness are a positive predictor for mental well-being. Kajbaf et al. (2013) show that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between Islamic lifestyle and contentment with life satisfaction. A study by Ahadi Narimani, Abolghasemi, and Asiai (2008) also showed that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self-efficacy with life satisfaction.

People who are blessed with higher levels of mental well-being and life satisfaction are more interested in taking on a constructive role in society, thereby creating more fruitful free time for themselves, and contributing to more public events. They have a more cooperative spirit and mainly have positive emotions and evaluations of the ongoing occurrences. On the other hand, people who are plagued with lower levels of mental well-being and life satisfaction evaluate situations and events as unfavorable and therefore experience negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and aggression (Diener, 2000).

Alternatively, individuals in closed cultures often experience a great deal of anxiety, and they fear that their behavior is deemed inappropriate, or that they are scolded, left out, and even rejected as a result. As such, it is expected that being closed is related to lower levels of well-being (Diener and Su, 2000; translated by Ghazanfari and Hashemi Azar, 2012). Research has shown that in individualistic cultures, there are high levels of self-esteem and optimism, which in turn leads to high inner well-being and life satisfaction. When coupled with competitiveness, individualism can lead to stress, and thus a decrease in life satisfaction. However, if individualism is associated with more freedom to pursue personal interests, these two characteristics of individualism can neutralize each other in affecting well-being (Diener and Su, 2000). In complex societies, however, one has more comparisons to choose from. A person may choose comparative goals that increase self-esteem and thus increase well-being and life satisfaction. Also, cultural complexity may lead to anxiety. Since cultural complexity is associated with individualism, that is, what is typically associated with competitiveness, thus, it can cause a decline in life satisfaction (Diener and Su, 2000).

The results of the conducted research show that defense mechanisms can be effective in improving and developing the life satisfaction of the elderly (Afzali, 2008). Owing to their role in the conceptualization of mental disorders and their psychodynamic nature, defense mechanisms are deeply examined and studied by researchers (Cramer, 2000). In the psychoanalytical system, every mental disorder is associated with certain maladaptive defense mechanisms (Blaya et al., 2006) and defenses play an important role in the mental health of people. Several studies have supported this assumption, and it has been determined

in the research that the physical and mental health of people is significantly related to their defense mechanisms (Bond and Perry, 2004). With this description, defense mechanisms logically have this capacity. which should be considered as one of the variables to improve living conditions and should be given special attention in therapeutic interventions. In this regard, the findings from the studies have also confirmed the importance of the relationship between therapeutic interventions and defense mechanisms. As an example, the studies conducted by Gharibi et al. (2015) show that educational facilities in the field of defense mechanisms are approved to improve the level of mental health better social functioning, and improve life satisfaction.

Given the aforementioned discussion, the research sought to determine the relationship between defense styles and life satisfaction in the elderly of Tabriz and whether defense styles can explain and predict the job satisfaction of the elderly in Tabriz. The findings of the current research can equip the experts in the field to improve the job satisfaction of the elderly, and on the other hand, it enriches the research literature on the subject.

Research method

The current research is an applied study that employs a descriptive-correlational design for its purposes. The statistical population of the research consists of elderly people of Tabriz with an age of 60 years or higher, the count of which was determined by the official statistics to stand at a figure of 82,159. According to Kerlinger's theory, for each variable, at least 30 individuals should be considered in the statistical sample, and hence the statistical sample of the present research was determined to be 60 individuals, given that the research seeks to use 2 variables, on top of which 20 individuals were added for accuracy purposes. A stratified random sampling method was established for the study sample, that is, first, the municipal areas of Tabriz City were determined, and then elder people were randomly sampled from each area based on the elderly population of that particular area.

The life satisfaction of the elderly was measured by the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI; Neugarten and Havighurst, 1961), who discovered 5 components of life satisfaction through their studies, which include desire for life (vs. insensitivity), steadiness and patience, congruence between desires and goals, positive self-concept. The defense styles were measured by the DSQ-40 (Andrews et al., 1993), which includes 20 defense mechanisms separated into 3 defense styles mature, immature, and neurotic defense styles.

To measure the validity of the questionnaire, the items of the instruments were discussed with three professors and experts in the field, which were then approved by the professors, given that they had been used time and again before. As a pilot, the questionnaires were first distributed among 25 individuals, the purpose of which was to determine Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The data gathered through questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS.

Research findings

The results showed that the mean, median, and mode for the variable of age are 67.1, 65, and 60 respectively, while the standard deviation and variance are 7.5 and 56.5 respectively. Moreover, the minimum and maximum values obtained for the aforementioned variable are 60 and 88 respectively.

Table 1: descriptive statistics for defense styles and life satisfaction

	Defense styles			**Life satisfaction**
	Immature	**Neurotic**	**Mature**	
Mean	111.5	45.3	44.9	41.12
Median	112.0	45.00	45.00	41.00
Mode	115.0	40.00	48.00	42.00
SD	23.8	9.4	8.6	4.18
Variance	568.9	89.2	74.7	17.49
Min	56.00	16.00	23.00	29.00
Max	167.00	72.00	68.00	48.00

The mean, median, and mode for the variable of life satisfaction are 41.12, 41, and 42, respectively, while the standard deviation and variance are 4.18 and 17.49, respectively. Furthermore, the minimum and the maximum of the aforementioned variable are 29 and 48 respectively. The range of the variable is (20-60). The mean, median, and mode for the variable of immature defensive style are 111.5, 112.0, and 115, respectively. Also, the standard deviation and variance are 23.8 and 568.9, respectively. The minimum and maximum values of the mentioned variable are 0.56 and 0.167, respectively.

Table 2: Pearson's correlation test results on the relationship between defense styles and life satisfaction of the elderly

Variable	Correlation Coeff.	p-value
Immature defense style -> life satisfaction	0.104	0.206
Mature defense style -> life satisfaction	0.115	0.159
Neurotic defense style -> life satisfaction	0.208	0.011

The results of Pearson's correlation test (Table 2) indicate that the statistical significance of the immature defense style is p=0.206, p=0.159 for the mature defense style p=0.159, and p=0.011 for the neurotic defense style. Considering that only the statistical significance of the neurotic defense style is less than p=0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the neurotic defense style and the life satisfaction of the elderly in Tabriz City.

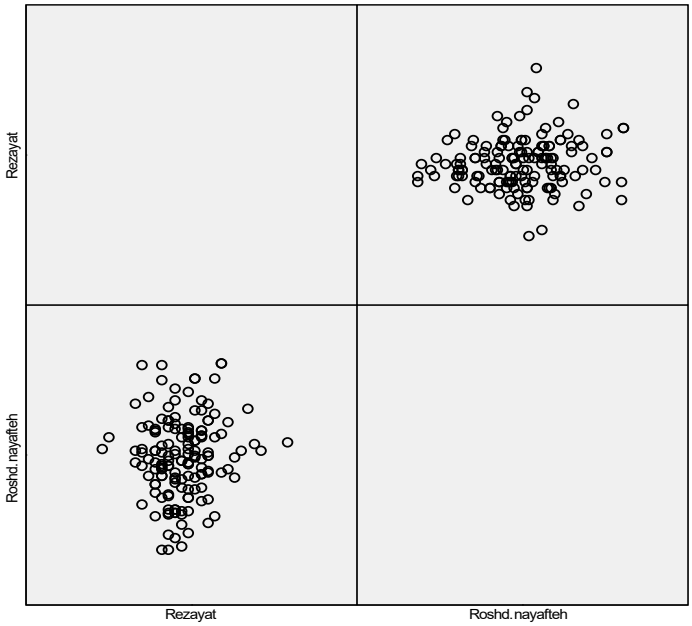

Figure 1: Distribution of the variables of immature defense style and life satisfaction

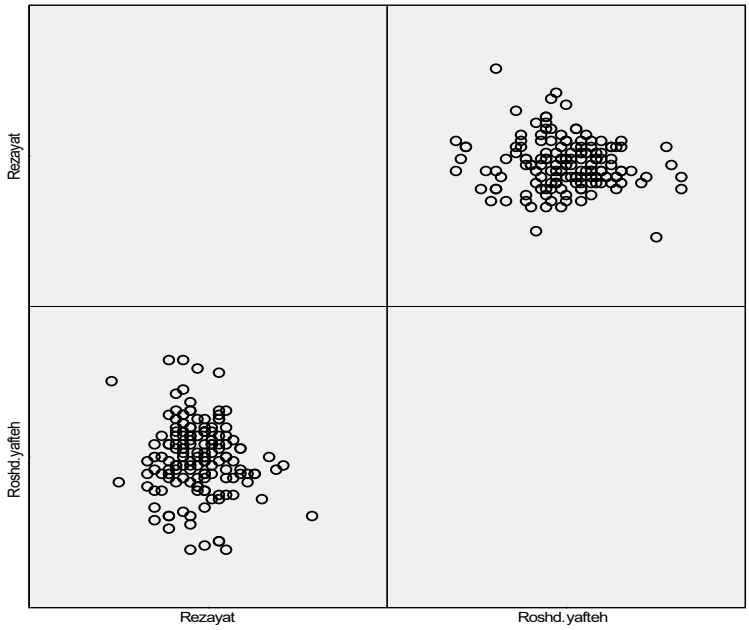

Figure 2: Distribution of the variables of mature defense style and life satisfaction

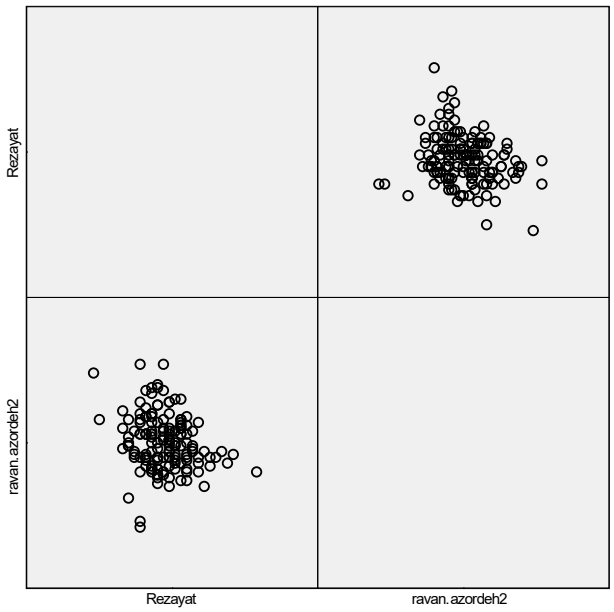

Figure 3: Distribution of the variables of neurotic defense style and life satisfaction

Conclusion

The results of the current research indicated that there is a statistically significant relationship between the neurotic defensive style and the life satisfaction of the elderly in Tabriz City. The findings of the current research are in line with those of Moradi Kord-Mahale (2015), who conducted a study to compare the quality of life, life satisfaction, and defensive styles in people with a history of cosmetic surgery and ordinary people. The results similarly revealed that there is a significant relationship between defense styles and life satisfaction. The author further discussed that since people with a history of cosmetic surgery are deemed psychologically vulnerable regarding their quality of life and hence use more defense mechanisms, providing psychological counseling before cosmetic surgery can alleviate the psychological load. Gharibi et al. (2015) examined the interactions between defense mechanisms and the perceived quality of life and social-emotional support in married women and reported that there is a significant relationship between defensive style and life satisfaction. They further discussed that employing educational and training measures for improved mental health and better social functioning are shown to be effective preventive and fundamental efforts for improving the quality of life and enhancing the defense mechanisms developed by married women.

It is safe to argue, based on the findings of the current research, that establishing friendly relationships with other people for the elderly in the nursing home or at home, is critical to their mental wellbeing. The elderly should be provided with instructions on how to deal with people who have made mistakes in their behavior. Furthermore, Books with behavioral contents are recommended to be made available for the elderly.

One of the limitations of the current research was the thin literature on the experimental background of the subject of this research, which has limited the opportunities for studying the previous results and using the findings for the current research.

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