

## INVESTIGATING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL GENERATIVITY LEVELS OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE MIDDLE ADULTHOOD PERIOD DEPENDING ON DIFFERENT VARIABLES

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### ABSTRACT

Individuals in the middle adulthood period might encounter many personal, social, professional and economic problems as they do in other developmental periods. The important point in this case is the ability of the individuals to create alternative solutions to deal with these problems and use their social generativity effectively without depriving themselves of their general psychological well-being. The aim of this study is to investigate the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals in the middle adulthood period depending on different variables and to shed lights on similar further studies. The participants of the study are 151 40-60-year-old individuals with different socio-economic levels in different cities. In this study based on a descriptive research model, the Short form of the Scales of Psychological Well-being and the Loyala Generativity Scale were used as data collection instruments. As a result of the regression analysis, it was realized that the psychological well-being variable predicts social generativity. In addition, it was found that while the psychological well-being and the social generativity scales do not differ significantly depending on the gender variable, both of these scales differ significantly depending on their educational background and whether they work or not. Furthermore, while psychological well-being differ significantly depending on socio-economic level, social generativity doesn't.

**Key Word:** Psychological well-being, social generativity, middle adulthood.

### INTRODUCTION

As in other psychosocial developmental periods, the middle adulthood is one of the life periods that should be adapted and dealt with wholesomely by individuals. Within the natural process of life-long development, individuals continue to develop in this period as they do in the earlier childhood and adolescence periods (Karacan, 2007). Individuals in the middle adulthood period might come across many personal, social, professional and economic problems. In addition to these, the age norms determined by the culture individuals live in and the responsibilities as well as the roles arising from these norms come into play during this period (Uçanok, 2001). Besides, individuals in the process of emotional change and development strive to reach a

specific level of competence during this period. They are also able to make new choices related to many issues in their personal, family and social life, gain experiences and discover things that have not been experienced beforehand. Towards the end of this period, on the other hand, individuals are inclined to achieve the goals they have wished for and wanted to reach (Ültanır and Ültanır, 2006 cited in Yazar, 2012).

Erik Erikson (1963) regards development as a process covering the whole life of the individual and defines the common characteristics of the period following the adolescence. The seventh phase overlapping with the middle adulthood period was defined by a period of "generativity vs. stagnation". If the individuals have successfully overcome the earlier phases in their lives, they can be productive, efficient and creative during this period. In this period, generativity refers to fertility, producing something and creativity. Self-development, producing something new, uncovering new ideas and leading to new generations are considered to be within the scope of generativity. Therefore, it is important to provide counseling to these individuals with regard to the continuation of their generation by means of having children and to the rearing of the future generation in such a way that they can do useful things both at home and outside in their social life. In brief, generativity is the basic characteristics of this phase. Unless the middle aged individuals can be generative, they can be stuck in the state of stagnation by feeling themselves useless later in life, might ignore what is happening in their surrounding and behave selfishly by establishing unhealthy relationships with others. In brief, from Erikson's perspective, generativity in general is the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation (Bacanlı and Işık-Terzi, 2013; Corey, 2008; Karacan and Berument, n.d.; Onur, 2011; Senemoğlu, 2007).

In their study involving fathers, Snarey et al. (1987) define three types of generativity as biological generativity (contribution to future generations by having children); parental generativity (getting involved in any child-rearing activities regardless of the having children) and social generativity (leading the society or contributing somehow to the society by involving in voluntary work, for example). Their study explored the relationship among these three types of generativity. As a result of the study, they concluded that biological and parental generativity made the achievement of the social generativity easier (Karacan, 2007; Karacan and Berument, n.d.). Thus, it would be fair to state that the ultimate objective in the middle adulthood period is to accomplish social generativity by means of the support of the other generativity types.

For an individual to spend the middle adulthood period productively in all aspects and to proceed healthily to the old age by meeting the developmental needs of the middle adulthood period, he/she needs to be motivated. This is true not only for the middle adulthood period but also for all the other life-long developmental phases. Thanks to this motivation, the individual can cope with the period-specific problems they encounter. For that reason, an individual's general happiness and psychological healthiness and wellness gain importance as they proceed to a socially productive middle adulthood period (Erikson, 1963 cited in Karacan, 2007).

In Myers, Sweneey & Witner's (2003) opinion, well-being is a way of life. More specifically, it refers to a functional life in all the areas of social and personal life for people tending towards being ideally healthy and good, integrating body, mind and spirit and for those with an individual purpose and an aim to lead to a productive life (Akça-Koca, 2013). Hence, people want to be happy and good as one of their biggest goals and perceive well-being in general as something embodying happiness (Ryff and Singer, 2006). On the other hand, for people to establish proper relationships with themselves and with their environment by being aware of their potentials, to set a goal in life and make efforts to reach this goal are important reflections of the state of psychological well-being. Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) define psychological well-being as a person's perception of him/herself as positive and explain that a person with psychological well-being is able to act autonomously, has a positive purpose in life, is able to establish positive relationships with the environment and is aware of his/her capacity and limitations (Hamurcu, 2011).

According to Ryff, psychological well-being is comprised of six components: The first component is "self-acceptance" that refers to an individual's positive assessment of his/her past life or of him/herself and to the recognition and acceptance of various aspects of the self. The second dimension is "positive relationships with others" that refers to a tendency towards quality, strong empathy, love and friendship in his/her relationships

with other people. The third component is "autonomy" that is a combination of the adjustment of the feeling of self-determination and the determination related to the self, the autonym and behaviors. The fourth component, "environmental mastery", refers to people's capacity to effectively manage their own lives and the life in their surroundings as well as their active involvement. On the other hand, 'purpose of life' is the fifth component described as the individuals' belief in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of their lives, their desires, targets and the accompanying feelings of meaningfulness and integrity. "Personal growth" is the last component that is described as having the feeling that their development is continuing and they gain new experiences and a sense of realizing their potentials (Ryff, 1995; Ryff and Singer, 2006). As can be understood from all components of psychological well-being and especially from "environmental mastery" and "purpose in life" components referring to their desires, their interaction with the environment to realize meaningful and integral goals in their lives is closely related to the concept of social generativity underlined by Erikson for middle adulthood period (Timur, 2008). Consequently, exploring the relationship between psychological well-being and social productivity that are focused in this study is important to help individuals to be able to overcome problems in the middle adulthood period more healthily, to realize necessary motivation areas and to lead to a more active and effective middle adulthood period. This study is also important as it can lead to further similar studies.

There have been some studies abroad dealing with the relationship between the psychological well-being and generativity of middle aged individuals. In these studies, it was found that generativity is a predictor of life satisfaction and happiness that are related to psychological well-being (McAdams, 1993 cited in Karacan, 2007). Similarly, some studies led to conclusion that generativity and psychological well-being are related (Jeong-Shin & Cooney, 2006; Ochse & Plug, 1989 cited in Huta & Zuroff, 2008; Peterson & Klohnen, 1995 cited in Karacan, 2007; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). For instance, Phelan (2002) whose participants were 74 college student and 67 middle aged people living in the USA investigated whether the generativity behaviors could be the predictor of the psychological well-being by keeping the marital status, age, health and income variables under control. She concluded that generativity level significantly predicts psychological well-being in terms of successful aging. In another study, Azarow (2003) focused on Erikson's view that psychological well-being and generativity are related. Conducting the study with 273 35-64-year-old participants, Azarow revealed that generativity and psychological well-being are connected.

On the other hand, some studies dealing with various topics and involving middle-aged groups have been carried out in our country. These studies are mostly in the form of comparison of the participants in terms of future time orientation (Güler-Edwards, 2008), adaptive self-management, psychological well-being, classic and everyday problem-solving performances (Altınordu, 2005), suicidal tendencies (Durak-Batıgün, 2002), job satisfaction and work efficiency (Güler, 1990). Similarly, Özkorumak, Sağlam Aykut and Tiryaki (2014) compared middle aged, old and young groups with mania disorders. In addition to this study, the anxiety and depression of middle aged women arising from menopause (Duç, 2014) and the anxiety levels of individuals in the middle age period (Gülnaz-Makiniz, 2003) are among other studies with different focuses studied in Turkey. However, no research studies investigating the relationship between the concepts of social generativity and psychological well-being have been encountered in our country. Thus, the current study aims to explore the relationship between the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals in the middle age period.

In line with the aim of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:

- Do the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals differ depending on the variables of gender, socio-economic level, educational background and whether they work or not?
- Are the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals related to each other?
- Is the social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals can significantly justify their psychological well-being?

## METHOD

In this part, the model of the research study, sample, data collection instruments and data analysis are explained.

### Research Model

In this research study, the relational screening model, which is a type of general screening model, was used. The relational screening model is a research model aiming to identify the presence and/or degree of the simultaneous change in two or more variables. This study can be categorized as a predictive relationship research study as it examines the relationship between the level of social generativity and psychological well-being (Karasar, 2005; Balci, 2005).

### Participants of the Study

The participants of the study are 151 adults (64 female and 87 female) living in İstanbul, Gaziantep and Balıkesir provinces. Their ages range from 40 to 60 and the mean of their ages is 46. Among the participants, 17 of them (11,3 %) categorized themselves in the low socio-economic level, 95 (62,9 %) in the middle socio-economic level while 39 (25,8%) in the high socio-economic level group. Also, 34 of the participants (22,5%) were primary school graduates while 9 (6,0%) were secondary school, 24 (15,9%) were high school, 84 (55,6%) were university graduates. Out of the total number of participants, 107 (70,9%) were working while the remaining 44 (29,1%) were not.

### Data Collection Instruments

**The Short form of the Scales of Psychological Well-being (PWBS-42):** The scales of psychological well-being (PWBS) were developed by Ryff (1989) as a self-report scale aiming to assess psychological well-being. The scale contains 6 sub-dimension (i.e. self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose of life and personal growth) each of which includes 14 questions. The total number of questions in the scale is 84. The highest score that can be obtained from the scale scored on the basis on the 7 Likert type is 504 while the lowest score is 84. High scores mean that the psychological well-being is high. On the other hand, Akin et al. (2012) adapted the Short form of the Scales of Psychological Well-being (PWB-42) into Turkish and studied its reliability and validity. Their study led to the PWBS's short form with 42 questions. The correlations of the sub-dimension of the English and Turkish forms are as follows: .94 for autonym, .97 for experimental mastery, .97 for personal growth, .96 for positive relationships, .96 for purpose of life and .95 for self-acceptance (Akin, 2008; Topuz, 2013).

**Loyala Generativity Scale (LGS):** Developed by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992), the Loyala Generativity Scale including 20 items assesses social productivity. The scale with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .76 assesses the individual's generative interest in making a positive and permanent impact on the future generations using their generative behaviors (Karacan, 2007; Vatan and Gençöz, n.d.).

The data of the study were collected from volunteering participants by means of these scales. The scales were administered by researchers in the houses and working places of the participants. Only the volunteering participants took part in the study. The administration of the scales took approximately 20. In addition to descriptive statistics used to analyze the data obtained in the study, Independent Samples T-Test, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient techniques and regression analysis were used. The data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0 package program.

## FINDINGS

The findings relevant to each research question are presented below:

The first research question of study is "Do the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals differ depending on the variables of gender, socio-economic level, educational background and whether they work or not?" The findings pertaining to this question are illustrated in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 1: Results of the Independent Group T-test Applied to Determine whether the Psychological Well-being Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Gender Variable

Score	Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	Sh $\bar{x}$	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Psy. Well-being	Male	64	213,24	29,57	3,69	-,230	149	,818
	Female	87	214,41	31,84	3,41			

As can be realized in Table 1, the Independent Group t-test done to reveal whether the "Psychological Well-being Scale" scores of the participants significantly differ depending on the gender variable showed that the difference in the arithmetic means of the groups was not significant ( $t = -,230; p >,05$ ).

Table 2: Results of the Independent Samples T-Test Applied to Determine whether the Generativity Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Gender Variable

Score	Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	Sh $\bar{x}$	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Generativity	Male	64	57,20	10,38	1,29	-,895	149	,372
	Female	87	58,62	9,01	,96			

Table 2 illustrates the results of the Independent Samples t-test done to find an answer to the question whether the "Generativity Scale" scores of the participants significantly differ depending on the gender variable. According to the results, the difference in the arithmetic means of the groups was not statistically significant ( $t = -,895; p >,05$ ).

Table 3: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test Applied to Determine Whether the Psychological Well-being Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Socio-economic Level Variable

Score	Groups	N	$\bar{x}_{sira}$	$x^2$	sd	p
Well-being	Low	17	42,15	15,63	2	,000
	Middle	95	75,36			
	High	39	92,31			
	Total	151				

Table 3 summarizing the results of the Kruskal Wallis-H test applied to investigate whether there is a significant difference in the "Psychological Well-being Scale" scores of the participants depending on the socio-economic level (SOL) variable indicates that the difference in the ranking averages (RA) of the groups was significant ( $x^2 = 15,63; p <,001$ ). Additionally, the results of the Mann Whitney U test done to reveal between which groups the difference occurs in the psychological well-being scores depending on the perceived SOL variable showed that the difference was between groups with perceived low and middle levels of SOL, and the difference was found to be in favor of the group with middle levels of SOL (RA=42,15) at the level of  $p <,05$ ; the difference between middle and high groups was found to be in favor of the group in the high level (RA=75,36) at the level of  $p <,05$ ; the difference between low and high group was in favor of high group (RA=92,31) at the level of  $p <,001$ .

Table 4: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test Applied to Determine Whether the Generativity Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Socio-economic Level Variable

Score	Groups	<i>N</i>	$\bar{x}_{sira}$	$x^2$	<i>sd</i>	<i>p</i>
Generativity	Low	17	60,32	5,84	2	,054
	Middle	95	73,54			
	High	39	88,82			
	Total	151				

Table 4 demonstrates the results of the Kruskal Wallis-H test done to explore whether there is a significant difference in the "Generativity Scale" scores of the participants depending on the SOL variable. From Table 4, it can be realized that the difference in the ranking averages of the group were not significant ( $x^2=5,84; p>,05$ ).

Table 5: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test Applied to Determine Whether the Psychological Well-being Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Educational Background Variable

Score	Groups	<i>N</i>	$\bar{x}_{sira}$	$x^2$	<i>sd</i>	<i>p</i>
Well-being	Primary School	34	55,03	19,42	3	,000
	Secondary School	9	52,83			
	High School	24	66,98			
	University/Higher	84	89,55			
	Total	151				

As can be understood from Table 5, according to the results of the Kruskal Wallis-H test applied to show whether the "Psychological Well-being Scale" scores differ depending on the educational background variable, the difference in the ranking averages of the groups were significant ( $x^2=19,42; p<,001$ ). Also, the Mann Whitney U test was used to reveal among which groups the difference occurs in the psychological well-being scores depending on the perceived educational background variable. The test revealed that the difference was between groups with primary school graduates and university or higher program graduates and the difference was found to be in favor of the group graduating from university or higher programs (RA=55,03) at the level of  $p<,001$ ; the difference between graduates of secondary school and graduates of university or higher programs was in favor of the latter group (RA=52,83) at the level of  $p<,05$ ; the difference between high school graduates and those who graduated from the university or graduate programs was also in favor of the latter (RA=66,98) at the level of  $p<,05$ . On the other hand, the difference in the ranking averages of the other groups was not found to be statistically significant ( $p>,05$ ).

Table 6: Results of the Kruskal Wallis-H Test Applied to Determine whether the Generativity Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Educational Background Variable

Score	Groups	<i>N</i>	$\bar{x}_{sira}$	$x^2$	<i>sd</i>	<i>p</i>
Generativity	Primary School	34	58,69	19,32	3	,000
	Secondary School	9	62,00			
	High School	24	57,00			
	University/Higher	84	89,93			
	Total	151				

As illustrated in Table 6, the Kruskal Wallis-H Test was applied to explain whether a significant difference in the "Productivity Scale" scores of the participants occurs depending on their educational background, and the test results revealed a significant difference in the ranging averages of the groups ( $x^2=19,32; p<,001$ ). Besides, the Mann Whitney U test was used to reveal among which groups the difference occurs, and the results of the test showed the following: the difference between participants who graduated from primary school and university

or higher programs was found to be in favor of the latter group (RA=58,69) at the level of  $p < .001$ ; the difference between high school graduates and the participants who graduated from university or higher graduates programs was similarly found to be in favor of the latter group (RA=57,00) at the level of  $p < .05$ . However, it was revealed that the difference in the ranking averages of the other groups was not statistically significant. ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 7: Results of the Independent Samples T-Test Applied to Determine whether the Psychological Well-being Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Working Conditions Variable

Score	Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	Sh $_{\bar{x}}$	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Psy. Well-being	Working	107	219,79	30,29	2,92	3,812	149	,000
	Not working	44	199,64	27,46	4,14			

As can be seen from Table 7, the Independent Samples t-test was used to identify whether the "Psychological Well-being Scale" scores of the participants differ depending on their working conditions. The result of the test showed that the difference in the arithmetic means of the groups was found to be significant in favor of the participants who were working at the time of the research study ( $t=3,812$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Table 8: Results of the Independent Samples T-Test Applied to Determine whether the Generativity Scale Scores Differ Depending on the Working Conditions Variable

Score	Groups	N	$\bar{x}$	ss	Sh $_{\bar{x}}$	t Test		
						t	Sd	p
Generativity	Working	107	59,42	10,03	,96	2,857	149	,005
	Not working	44	54,61	7,57	1,14			

As presented in Table 8, the Independent Samples t-test done to investigate whether the "Generativity Scale" scores of the participants significantly differ depending on the working conditions variable revealed that the difference in the arithmetic means of the groups was in favor of the group including participants who were working ( $t=3,812$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

The second research question is "Are the psychological well-being and social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals related to each other?" Findings relevant to this question are presented in Table 9:

Table 9: Results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Applied to Determine the Relationship between the Psychological Well-being Scale Scores and Generativity Scale Scores

Variables	N	R	P
Psy. Well-being Generativity	151	,527	,000

As shown in Table 9, the Pearson analysis used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the psychological well-being scale scores and generativity scale scores of the participants led to the finding that the relationship among the variables was found to be significantly positive ( $r=.52$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

The third research question of this study is "Is the social generativity levels of 40-60-year-old individuals can significantly justify their psychological well-being?" Table 10 summarizes the findings related to this question.

Table 10: Results of the Regression Analysis Applied to Determine the Predictive Power of the Social Generativity Scale Scores for the Psychological Well-being

Model 1	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	T	p
Generativity	,527	,278	,527	7,579	,000

a Dependent Variable: Psychological well-being

As illustrated in Table 10, as a result of the regression analysis applied to reveal the predictive power of the "Social Generativity Test" scores for the "Psychological Well-being Test" scores, the model was found to be significant ( $F=57,436$ ;  $p<,05$ ). In other words, the results showed that the predictive power of the "Social Generativity Test" scores for the "Psychological Well-being Test" scores was found to be significant ( $R^2=,278$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Social generativity justifies approximately 27% of the psychological well-being.

## DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the study, there is a positive relationship between the participants' scores of psychological well-being and their scores of social generativity. This finding is in line with the views of Eriksonian approach (Erikson, 1963 cited in Azarow, 2003). Additionally, researchers such as Azarow (2003), McAdams (1993), Peterson & Klohnen (1995), Ochse & Plug (1989) and Phelan (2002) found similar results in their studies. Similarly, Peterson & Klohnen (1995) concluded in their study that productivity and psychological well-being are related. For instance, McAdams (1993) revealed that productivity could predict life satisfaction and happiness that are related to psychological well-being. On the other hand, Azarow (2003) evaluated Erikson's idea that psychological well-being and productivity are related. As a result of this study whose participants were 273 35-64-year-old people living in Illinois, it was realized that productivity and psychological well-being are related.

Moreover, the social generativity levels of the participants can significantly predict their psychological well-being. Involving 74 college students and 67 middle aged individuals living in the USA, Phelan's (2002) study explored whether the generativity behaviors could predict the psychological well-being by keeping the age, marital status, income and health variables under control. The study yielded the finding that generativity level significantly predicts psychological well-being in terms of successful aging.

The variables of socio-economic level, educational background and whether they work or not are focused within the scope of the present study. According to the data obtained in the present study, educational level and working condition caused significant differences in the psychological well-being and social generativity scores of the participants while the gender variable did not result in any significant differences. Though psychological well-being differ significantly depending on socio-economic level, social generativity doesn't differ. Thus, it would be fair to suggest that working participants have higher levels of psychological well-being, and social generativity and working play an effective role in the development process of their personality. In Azarow's (2003) study, it was found that generativity and well-being do not differ depending on gender. However, contrary to the findings of the present study, Azarow's study revealed that generativity and psychological well-being do not differ depending on the income and educational background. The difference between the findings of Azarow's study and the current study might result from the cultural differences of two different samples selected in Turkey and the USA.

The findings of the study also show that the scales differ depending on the educational background variable only in the university and higher levels. This result implies that graduating from a university or from any higher graduate programs is an important factor in increasing individuals' well-being and social generativity.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that as the individuals' socio-economic levels increase, the levels of their psychological well-being decrease. This finding can be justified by stating that individuals cannot satisfy their psychological needs as they are occupied with meeting their basic personal needs. On the other hand, the fact that the social generativity doesn't differ depending on socio-economic level can be considered to be a result of their all socio-economic level's openness to help others.

Considering the effects of the social generativity and psychological well-being of the individuals in the middle adulthood period on their personality development, it can be recommended that it would be useful for them to acquire a profession and work and raise their educational level to the university level so that they can increase their level of generativity.

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