

Differences and similarities between older people of south africa's diverse socie...

[Society](#)



The biographical questionnaire was a useful tool to gain valuable information about the two participants' social and physical environment. Participant 1 lives with a family member in an urban environment while participant 2 lives with his wife and children in a house that he owns in a rural environment.

Family connections are of great significance to older individuals, these connections include relationships with children, grandchildren, the spouse or siblings. Participant 1 reported that he is divorced and has contact with only one of his children and no contact with his grandchild. Participant 2 is married and has three children and five grandchildren which he sees frequently. Both participants reported to have between 1-5 friends, while only participant 2 reported to have a close friend with whom he can count on for emotional support. Both participants show a higher tendency towards internal locus of control as opposed to external locus of control. Individuals with a tendency toward internal locus, show higher levels of life satisfaction than those who show a tendency towards external locus of control. Life satisfaction is an understanding of life quality in which the meaning is found through the individual's subjective experience. According to Oleszkowicz, & Wieczorek-Malecka, in positive psychology, the equivalent of life quality is a subjectively experienced state of wellness defined as the cognitive and emotional evaluation of one's own life. Participant 1 scored significantly less on his life satisfaction questionnaire than participant 2 showing that although it is widely suggested that locus of control influences life satisfaction it is not always the case and other factors should also be taken in account to get a more holistic perspective of issues relating to life satisfaction of older adults.

Discussion

Participant 1 and 2 are closely related in age, however they differ in regard to ethnicity, socio economic backgrounds and have clear variations with regards to personal and environmental characteristics. Due to inequalities because of apartheid, evaluation of the quality of life of elderly persons in South Africa must take into consideration the historical divisions of society along racial lines.

Case studies such as this one is important to shed light on specific individual differences and similarities between older people of South Africa's diverse society. In recent times the number of scholarly articles relating to old age has been growing and this could be since " South Africa has the highest percentage of older persons in Africa".

Personal Factors**Locus of Control**

Locus of control is closely linked to older peoples' adjustment in later adulthood, as mentioned earlier locus of control is associated with the belief individuals have about their ability to control their lives. Internal locus of control is usually associated with greater life satisfaction while external locus of control is associated with the opposite. Individuals might begin to feel helpless and controlled by external factors if they experience losses which they feel they had no control over for e. g. forced retirement, a loss of a loved one and inactivity as a result of ill health etc.

Education

In a study conducted by Bishop et al., the results found that past individual accomplishments and achievements (i. e., congruence) relative to individual resources significantly contributed directly or indirectly to present happiness in later adulthood. Given the historical context of South Africa most older adults had limited access to education, which manifest through high levels of unemployment and underdevelopment in all regions of the country. While financial resources have a greater impact on life satisfaction in older adulthood than education, it could be argued that education is often linked to professional employment and development which increases financial resources. Educational disadvantages are more prominent among older African persons, with over half (58%) having had no formal education.

While I was assisting participant 2 with his questionnaire, he reported to have a grade 3 education and said that he has only one regret in life and that is due to financial reasons he wasn't able to give his children a formal education.

Economic Factors

While financial strain could lead to economic dependency which decreases subjective wellbeing of older adults. In South Africa the opposite seems to hold true since an increasing number of elderly persons are actively involved in a struggle to earn a living. This is caused mostly by the HIV/ AIDS pandemic that is causing older persons great strain to provide for their children and grandchildren as the primary caregivers on whom they count on for emotional and financial support. In South Africa, the government sponsors a non-contributory pension for individuals from the age of 60 years.

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A study reporting on the impact of pensions on health and wellbeing in rural areas showed that although old age pension enhances the financial wellbeing of older adults, social wellbeing is often gendered and only short lived. The research is significant and could indicate that pensions are not enough to provide for the needs of older individuals in South Africa. Another explanation for the dissatisfaction amongst older people could be that older people have to contribute their income to their households to sustain their families. When this is the case, resources for older people are decreased which have a variety of negative impacts such as limiting them from gaining access to healthcare, struggling to make ends meet and feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

Health

There is a general agreement among the scientific community that health, socioeconomic status (SES), and social support are the primary correlates of subjective well-being in older adulthood. It should however be kept in mind that, life satisfaction is only one component of subjective well-being and reflects only on how people perceive their lives. According to various studies self-rated health is more closely related to life satisfaction than compared to objective health measures and life satisfaction. Health, illness and disease are defined as “ the normality with illness as a deviation from the normal”. According to the literature, physical and functional health is closely linked to declines in overall life satisfaction, while life satisfaction does not seem to have an impact on health. Mental health impacts more severely on life satisfaction than physical health, the most prevalent mental disorders in older adults are depression, delirium, dementia, anxiety disorders, psychotic

disorders and substance abuse. As physical and mental health decline with advanced age, the level of dependence on significant others may also increase.