

Meaning of Life in Retirees: The Relationship of Personality Traits and Religious Attitude

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Abstract

Introduction: Retirement is one of the most important spans of life especially in current times which aged population is growing fast and needs more attention. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between personality traits and religious attitudes with the meaning of life in retirees.

Methods: The present study was descriptive and correlational. The population included all inhabitants in Nahavand of Iran which 200 of them were selected by simple random sampling method. The research tools were NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Religious Attitude Scale (RAS) and Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ). Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Results: The results showed that there was a significant relationship between personality traits and meaning of life ($p < 0.05$). There was a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and meaning of life ($p < 0.05$), and there were significant positive relationships between the meaning of life with extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness ($p < 0.05$). There was also a significant positive relationship between religious attitude and meaning of life ($p < 0.05$). The results of multiple regression analysis showed that agreeableness, conscientiousness, and religious attitude could explain 37% of the meaning of life variance significantly ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Overall the results showed that agreeableness, conscientiousness and religious attitude have important role in people's sense of meaning in their lives.

Declaration of Interest: None.

Key words: Personality traits, Religious attitude, Meaning of life, Retirement.

Introduction

Retirement is a socio-economic phenomenon that will inevitably occur in every person's life, also the preparation for transition from a past role to a new stage of life (1). As work is a part of human life, retirement is also a stage in human life. Christ and colleagues (1) have studied the improvement of working life of employees, the retirement time also must be taken into account in researches and studies, so

that it won't be a critical span of life anymore and does not result in lack of balance and motivation in retiree's life. In the last century, current advances have reduced mortality, improved life expectancy and increased lifetime (2). Consequently, the number of retirees has increased and gained a considerable share in the population composition of different countries (2).

One important issue in the retirement span is the meaning of life for a person who is reviewing the past, which means remembering past experiences, thinking about them, reconsidering them and in order to achieve more self-awareness, think about the meaning of them (3). Finding meaning is a key aspect of regulating illnesses and life-threatening diseases, and refers to the perceived relationship between a person and his or her own world in the context of specific events (4). The famous Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, Victor Frankl (5), believed that the main purpose of individuals in life is not to avoid pain or find pleasure, but to discover meaning. Meaning of life has been defined in various ways. For example, Pirtle and Plata (6) considered it as a perception of cohesion and solidarity. Yalom (7) sees the meaning of life as a combination of the external demands of a person in relation to his inner world. Also, Baumeister (8) believed that feeling of meaning achieves by addressing the basic needs of purposefulness, efficiency, and self-esteem. But it seems that the definition of Reker (9) is more comprehensive than the meaning of life in other definitions. He recognizes the meaning of life as the perception of order, the coherence, the purpose in existence, and pursuing worthwhile goals and achieving them with satisfaction. Therefore, according to the theories and researchers in the meaning of life domain, it can be stated that this concept consists of two important dimensions: the first dimension is the level of understanding of meaningfulness and purposefulness of their life. The second dimension relates to searching for meaning in people's lives (10).

One of the fundamental variables that are related to the meaning of life is the personality traits of individuals (11, 12). The basic and fundamental aspect of human personality is deliberate, conscious intentions, his/her hopes, and wishes. These

goals are in fact the motivations of a healthy personality and are the best guide to understand the current human behavior (13). However, a brief look at the definitions of personality suggests that the whole meaning of personality cannot be found in a particular theory and the definition of personality depends on the viewpoint of each scientist (13). Personality refers to the person's external and visible features, those aspects which other people can see in the person (13). Despite the lack of a comprehensive definition of personality, McCrae and Costa (14) used factor analysis to describe personality with five main factors of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. A person with neuroticism trait is upset, negative, and susceptible to depression. Neuroticism is associated with anger, anxiety, and depression (15). To explain extroversion, Costa and McCrae (16) take note of the warmth, collectivism, decisiveness, activity, excitement and positive emotions. Openness to experience is characterized as being open to new thoughts, cultural preferences, educational feedback, and creativity. A person with this character has curiosity about the inside and outside world, his life is rich in experience and has the tendency to accept new ideas and unconventional values. Agreeableness is characterized by self-sacrifice. Agreeable people are modest, warm, empathetic, and good-natured. Also, they are adaptive and flexible in dealing with the events of life (15). A person with the conscientious trait is efficient, regular and responsible, has a high degree of discipline and control in the conduct of his affairs, is reliable and does his best to carry out the task assigned to him (17). Some studies show that there is a relationship between personality traits and meaning in life (11, 12).

In addition to personality traits, religious attitude is also related to the meaning of life.

In this way, religion as the central factor in creating a sense of meaning in life provides beliefs, expectations and key goals for people and put their lives in a broader perspective. Some studies show the relationship between religion and sense of meaning in life (18, 19). Today, most scholars believe that religion has an important impact on mental health and other dimensions of human life. Religion is effective in reducing the negative effects of human pressures and has important functions such as a feeling of hope, being close to others, emotional tranquility, prosperity, closeness to God, and helping to solve various problems (20). Tacedy (21) states that the role of religion is to solve the problems of values and, consequently, to make sense of human life. Jianbin and Mehta (21) argue that religion can make the old people and retirees adapt to aging processes, including physical, social, and existential processes, and also religious attitudes make their life more tolerable and increase their existential value. Some other studies support the effect of religion on the meaning of life and some other health-related issues (22-24). This study investigates the relationship between personality traits and religious attitude with the meaning of life.

Method

The present research is a descriptive and correlational study in which the role of personality traits and religious attitudes in predicting the meaning of retirement life has been studied. The statistical population of the study consisted of all retirees in Nahavand, 200 of them were selected randomly as a sample of research. Considering that one of the methods for determining the sample size is to calculate the average sample size of the three former studies that have been done in the field of the subject (25), therefore, in this study, this method was used to estimate the sample size. These three studies were: Saffarian and Ashoori's (26) study with a

sample of 200 people, as well as Molaei, Yazdanbakhsh, and Karami's (27) research with a sample of 211 people, and a research by Hosseini et al. (28) which the sample was equivalent to 155 people. By calculating the average sample size of these three studies, this number was equal to 188 people. Therefore, 200 questionnaires were distributed for the probable loss of samples and non-completion of questionnaires.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: People who have been retired for at least one year, don't have any particular illness or disorder, don't have any specific problem in terms of vision to complete research questionnaires, have the necessary hearing ability to understand the purpose of the study and consciously consenting to participate in the study.

Short Form of Big Five Personality Questionnaire (NEO): To measure personality traits, the short form of the five factor questionnaire (16) was used, which has 60 questions with five Likert scale. The questionnaire measures 5 dimensions of the normal personality and includes 12 items for each of the five dimensions (16). The five factors are neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The reported alpha coefficients of the NEO-FFI factors by McCrae and Costa (14) were varied from 0.44 to 0.89 with a mean of 0.81. In the research of Sepahmansour, Delavar, and Saffarinia (29), the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for neuroticism (0.75), extraversion (0.77), openness to experience (0.80), agreeableness (0.75) and conscientiousness (0.77) were obtained. The reliability of the scale in the present study was calculated using Cronbach's alpha for the subscale of neuroticism (0.71), extraversion (0.72), openness to experience (0.70), agreeableness (0.65) and conscientiousness (0.81).

Religious Attitude Scale (RAS): This questionnaire was prepared by Khodayarifard et al. (30) and includes 40 questions about the areas of worship, morality, values, the effect of religion in life and human behavior, social issues, the objective world and beliefs, science and religion. Scoring is based on Likert that varies from never (1) to always (5). The reliability coefficient in this questionnaire was 0.98 for split-half and 0.95 for Cronbach's alpha. Another study showed that the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire and all dimensions were desirable and satisfactory (31). In this questionnaire, items of 2-4-7-10-20-23-25-29-31-34-37-38 were scored as A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E-5, and the other items were scored in reverse order. The higher the individual's score was, the higher the religious attitude (24). The reliability of the scale was 0.83 using Cronbach's alpha method in this study.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ): This scale is created by Steger and colleagues (10) to assess the meaning of life and attempt to find it. The scale consists of 10 items and has the two sub-scales of meaning in life and

the search for meaning. The items of 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 assess the search for the meaning and the items of 1, 4, 5, 6, 9 (item 9 with reverse coding) assess the dimension of the meaning in life with a Likert scoring of Completely wrong (1) to Completely right (7) in which higher scores mean higher meaning in life of higher searching for meaning. Steger and colleagues (2006) reported a desirable reliability for the sub-scales of the meaning in life (0.86) and searching for meaning (0.87). The test re-test reliability of the scale in Iran with a two-week interval for the sub-scale of meaning in life was 0.84 and for the subscale of searching for meaning was 0.74 (32). The reliability of this scale in the present study using the Cronbach's alpha method was 0.85 for searching for meaning and 0.88 for meaning of life.

Results:

Table 1 describes the age and demographic characteristics of the participants

Table 1: Age and demographic criteria

Variables	Male		Female		Total	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Age	57.19	6.06	56.5	5.58	57.03	5.94
Retirement age	51.19	3.13	50.44	2.36	51.02	2.98
Management history	5.27	6.13	2.85	5.00	4.71	5.96
Number of children	3.24	1.34	2.29	1.05	3.02	1.34

The results presented in table 1 show that men are higher than women in age, but using t-test, the results shows that the difference is not significant ($p>0.05$), also the retirement age is higher in men, which is not significant in t-test ($p>0.05$), management history years are higher in men which is significant in t-test ($p<0.05$)

and also the number of their children are higher in men which is significant in t-test ($p<0.05$). The results of t-test are prepared in Table 2.

Table 2: T-test results of the comparison between Males and Females on Age, Retirement age Management history, Number of children

Variables	T	Df	Sig.	Mean Difference
Age	0.59	144	0.55	0.69
Retirement age	1.9	144	0.19	0.75
Management history	2.34	144	0.02	2.42
Number of children	3.76	144	0.001	0.94

Table 3: Sociological features of the sample

Demographic characteristics		Male		Female	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Job	Teacher	46	41.1 %	24	70.6 %
	Health Personnel	30	26.8 %	9	26.5 %
	Insurance and Bank	21	18.8 %	0	0.0 %
	Governor's and Municipality	7	6.3 %	0	0.0 %
	Other	8	7.1 %	1	2.9 %
Education	Below Diploma	12	10.7 %	0	0.0 %
	Diploma	34	30.4 %	15	44.1 %
	Bachelor Degree	60	53.6 %	19	55.9 %
	Masters	6	5.4 %	0	0.0 %
Marriage situation	Married	111	99.1 %	34	100 %
	Single	1	0.9 %	0	0.0 %
Job Change History	Yes	12	10.7 %	0	0.0 %
	No	100	89.3 %	34	100 %

The results of table 3 show that most of the samples were teachers and health personnel, in terms of education, they mostly had a bachelor's degree and a diploma, and they were mostly married in terms of marital status. Meanwhile, some people in the sample group reported no information in some cases.

The mean and standard deviation of the variables of the study are also presented in table 4. The results of correlation between the variables of the study are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficients Matrix between Research Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Neuroticism	1						
2 Extraversion	-0.51**	1					
3 Openness	-0.16*	0.30**	1				
4 Agreeableness	-0.51**	0.52**	0.17*	1			
5 Conscientiousness	-0.40**	0.50**	0.25**	0.53**	1		
6 Religious Attitude	-0.12	0.05	0.14*	0.07	0.18*	1	
7 Meaning of life	-0.24**	0.36**	0.18*	0.43**	0.52**	0.34**	1

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

The results of table 4 show that there are relationships between the personality traits, religious attitude and the meaning of life. As the results indicate, the meaning of life has significant relationships with personality traits. Neuroticism has a negative significant correlation with the meaning of life ($r=-0.24$, $p<0.01$), which means that people who score higher in neuroticism feel their life less meaningful. Extroversion has a moderate positive correlation with the meaning of life ($r=0.36$, $p<0.01$), which suggests that extravert individuals feel more meaningful in their lives. The openness to the experience showed a significant positive weak correlation with the meaning of life ($r=0.18$, $p<0.05$), which means that there is the greater meaning of life in those who have a greater openness to the experience. The agreeableness also showed a moderate

positive and significant correlation with the meaning of life ($r=0.43$, $p<0.01$), which means a greater sense of meaning in life in people with higher agreeableness scores. The conscientiousness also showed a significant positive correlation with the meaning of life ($r=0.52$, $p<0.01$), which means those with higher conscientiousness would have more meaning in their lives. There was a significant positive correlation between the religious attitude of people with the meaning in their lives ($r=0.34$, $p>0.01$), which means that people with higher religious attitude feel more meaning in their lives. To examine the prediction of the meaning of life by personality traits and religious attitudes, multiple stepwise regression was used. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Multiple stepwise regression analysis to predict the meaning of life through personality traits and religious attitudes

Model	R	R ²	R ² Adjusted	F	Sig	
1	0.62	0.38	0.37	14.35	0.001	
Dependent Variable	Predictor Variables	B	STE	Beta	T	Sig
Meaning of Life	Neuroticism	-0.11	0.09	-0.09	-1.16	0.246
	Extroversion	0.10	0.10	0.07	0.99	0.323
	Openness	0.17	0.14	0.08	1.22	0.223
	Agreeableness	0.35	0.13	0.23	2.59	0.010
	Conscientiousness	0.41	0.11	0.32	3.76	0.001
	Religious Attitude	0.11	0.03	0.28	4.08	0.001

The results of table 5 show that the personality traits and religious attitudes with multiple correlation coefficients of 0.62 could significantly predict 38% of the dependent variable, which is the meaning of life. In the meantime, only agreeableness, conscientiousness, and religious attitudes were able to significantly predict the meaning of life. Agreeableness with a beta coefficient of 0.23 positively predicts the meaning of life ($p<0.05$) and conscientiousness with a beta coefficient of 0.32 positively predicts the meaning of life ($p<0.001$). Religious attitudes with a beta

coefficient of 0.28 positively predict the meaning of life ($p<0.001$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between personality traits and religious attitudes with the meaning of life among retired people. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between personality traits (neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) and religious attitude with

the meaning of life. In explaining these findings, it can be acknowledged from neuroticism having a meaningful negative correlation with the meaning of life, that people who score higher in neuroticism feel less meaningful in their life. This result is consistent with the study of Halama (33), which says that high neuroticism, as a high level of negative emotions, emotional lability or self-doubts can prevent a meaningful life, it can disrupt an optimistic worldview and goal endeavoring, and it can make trouble in the ability to feel fulfillment and joy. Neurotic people may experience excessive mobility in relation to the external environment. People with a high degree of neuroticism are likely to experience negative feelings, such as anxiety, depression, hostility, and vulnerability, because they tend to put themselves in a position which strengthens the negative impact (34), which can lead to less meaningful lives. Also, the result is consistent with the findings of Halama and Dedova (11) and Kashdan and Steger (12). Extroversion had a moderate positive correlation with the meaning of life, which is consistent with the findings of other studies (11, 12). As mentioned in the study of Halama (33), high extraversion expressed in high positive emotions, high sociability and cheerfulness can increase meaning of life of a person, and the ability of the person to have a positive worldview, and high commitment in life goals and experience satisfaction in life. This implies the significance of extraversion for increasing feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction. Openness to experience showed a significantly weak positive correlation with the meaning of life, this finding is consistent with earlier findings (11,12). Openness is characterized by "spiritual intelligence" (philosophical and intellectual) and Non-compliance (imaginary, independent and unauthorized) (34), which means more meaning of life in people who have higher openness to

experience. The agreeableness also showed a moderate positive correlation with the meaning of life. Agreeableness refers to cooperation (trusting others and caring) and tendencies (kindness, happiness) and also pleasant and satisfying relationships with others. Furnham and Cheng (35) have recently identified primary indicators of potential agreeable character, including parental social status, child's intelligence, education, occupation, and gender. According to the findings of the present study, higher scores of agreeableness mean a greater sense of meaning in life, which is not consistent with the findings of Halama and Dedova (11) and is consistent with the results of Kashdan and Steger (12). In Halama (33) study, the relationship between openness with meaning of life was significant in elderly but not in young people and for agreeableness was vice versa. Differences between young and elderly in findings can be understood and described by taking into account the different developmental situations of these phases of life. The main developmental task in young adulthood is to create intimate relationships, and agreeableness can be useful in accomplishing this task. Therefore, agreeableness can have a positive role in feeling meaningful in life. But for the elderly, there are different tasks to fulfill. The elderly gets restricted in physical and social activities, and they need the ability of being dynamic and involved in order to pass successfully through this life period. High openness to experience can make people capable of changing the old and nonfunctioning sources of meaning to new ones (33). According to the findings of the present study, people with higher conscientiousness experience more meaning in their lives, which is in line with previous findings (11,12). Conscientiousness refers to the level of organization of individuals, hard work, and motivation in achieving the goals, as well as adequacy, order, and responsibility

(34). These features have a great potential role in feeling meaningful in life, particularly in the motivational part because high conscientiousness makes people more engaged in their goals and therefore they put more effort achieving their goals (33).

Also, the results of this study showed that higher levels of religious attitude in retirees lead to greater sense of meaning and satisfaction, which is in line with previous research (36-38). Religion has long been recognized as a central source of meaning in life, providing people with basic beliefs, expectations, and goals, and placing a person's life in a larger and ultimate context (39-42). It is not strange that one special issue of the Journal of Social Issues is devoted to the role of religious faith as a semantic system (43). There are also various aspects of mental well-being, including the meaning of life along with religiosity (44). Steger and Frazier (45) in their studies stated that religious faith has a strong relationship with experiencing meaning in life and also the meaning of life highlights the psychological benefits associated with religiousness. In a study conducted by Dehkordi and colleagues (38) on elderly people under welfare organization support, they found that old people with a religious attitude have a greater sense of meaning in their lives. Sayadi, Jamali, and Mirghafouri (46) stated that religious behaviors and attitudes have a positive effect on making life meaningful. Behaviors such as putting your destiny in the hands of God, worship, pilgrimage could provide hope and inner peace for elderlies. Having meaning and purpose in life, feeling of belonging to a supreme source, hoping for God's help in difficult life situations, enjoying the social and spiritual protection of being religious are all among the ways that could help religious people feel less pressure in facing stressful life events.

The results of this study also showed that personality traits and religious attitudes could

significantly predict the meaning of life, which is only agreeableness, conscientious, and religious attitudes were able to significantly predict the meaning of life. These findings are inconsistent with previous findings (11, 12, 33) in which neuroticism and extraversion were between 3 highly related personality traits with meaning of life, the other highly related trait in the mentioned studies was conscientious which is consistent with this study. These differences can be explained in this way that in Halama (33) and Halama and Dedova (11) studies, they used different tool to measure meaning of life, and in Kashdan and Steger (12) they report correlation of big five with two subscale separately but still the results was much more similar to this study than the first two mentioned studies. It can be said that among all of the predictor variables agreeableness, conscientious, and religious attitudes are the most important variables, which can explain independent portions of variances in meaning of life, so they should be taken into consideration in any further study in this area.

Conclusions

Considering the findings of this research and earlier studies, it seems that personality traits (specially agreeableness, conscientious) and religious beliefs are important factors influencing life's meaning. According to the research literature and the findings of this research, personality should be a determinant variable because it can predict and explain some of the changes in the meaning of life. Also the result shows that as always personality, which is a relatively constant feature through life, continues its influence on this aspect of life up to the old ages. On the other hand, since participating in religious activities can have many positive effects on retirees' lives such as creating a sense of meaning in life, in order to improve the meaning of life in retirees, it is recommended that these people participate in

workshops about spirituality during retirement to understand and feel the meaning of their lives better.

The present study, due to its novelty among Iranian and even foreign samples, requires more repetition in different samples and need more experimental supports. Research findings should be interpreted with caution. The research sample (retirees in the city of Nahavand) and the type of research (correlational) make some limitations for the generalization of the findings, interpretations, and also making cause and effect conclusions. In addition, the problems and limitations of self-reporting tools in this study should not be ignored. Lack of access to a big sample size was among the other constraints of this study.

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