

Qualitative Study of the Wishes of the Elderly in Tehran

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Yousefi, Z., & Mahmoudi, Z. (2023). Qualitative Study of the Wishes of the Elderly in Tehran. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 1(1), 51-57.
<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.psynexus.1.1.6>



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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to qualitatively explore the range and nature of wishes among the elderly, considering demographic variables, to better understand their needs and aspirations during old age. Employing a phenomenological approach, the research analyzed data from in-depth interviews with 100 seniors, focusing on their expressed wishes and desires. Purposeful sampling was utilized to ensure a diverse representation of demographic backgrounds. Analysis revealed seven categories of elderly wishes: health and happiness, family desires, desire for death, seeking meaning, worldly desires, homeland desires, and personal security, with health and family being predominant. The findings underscore the significance of health maintenance and family support in the well-being of the elderly, suggesting that these areas should be prioritized in care strategies and policy planning. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of elderly needs, facilitating more targeted and effective support mechanisms.

Keywords: *Elderly wishes, phenomenology, qualitative research, health desires, family support, elderly care.*

1. Introduction

Aging is a stage where its positive and negative aspects coexist. If one can emphasize the positive aspects of this stage while reducing its negatives, aging can become a desirable period (Minamiguchi & Suzuki, 2019; Simmons et al., 2021). The increasing elderly population has been a significant factor in garnering more attention to this field. The rise in the elderly population has drawn professionals'

attention to their basic needs, including health, emotional, and psychological needs (Balasundram et al., 2023; Quinlan & O'Neill, 2008). The global growth of the elderly population poses a major challenge for both healthcare providers and family members and communities where the elderly live. However, there is evidence that neglect or even abuse of the elderly in society is increasing. Neglect and abuse of older individuals contribute to their harm, despair, and distress. These adversities are occurring both

intentionally and unintentionally at physical, psychological, emotional, and financial levels (Minamiguchi & Suzuki, 2019; Simmons et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is necessary to increasingly consider psychological constructs during old age, one of which is desires. In this context, the World Health Organization (2006) has focused on empowering these individuals in three areas: health improvement, elderly welfare, and assurance in creating empowering and supportive environments, considering their needs, desires, aspirations, and wishes (Marshall et al., 2014). One of the most important institutions created in pursuit of these issues is the non-profit organization Aging with Dignity in the United States. This organization has issued a directive called Five Wishes, which has legal and medical aspects (Wenger et al., 2012).

The first wish relates to having someone to make medical decisions in case of incapacity. The second wish indicates the individual's preferred type of treatment. The third wish determines the individual's preferred care. The fourth wish specifies who the individual wants to be with and where, in case of illness. The fifth wish expresses the individual's desires and wishes regarding post-death arrangements (Marshall et al., 2014; Wenger et al., 2012).

However, the Five Wishes model proposed by the Aging with Dignity institution primarily relates to medical care and is used during chronic illnesses. It seems that the elderly may have other aspirations and wishes besides optimal care and medical needs. Indeed, they have preferences about how they are treated, what activities they want to engage in during retirement, and how they want their social relationships to be. Addressing these issues can provide conditions for them to end their lives more comfortably, also leading to hope and, consequently, creating meaning in their lives. Meaning in life for the elderly leads to adaptation, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, social support, and a reason to live (Marshall et al., 2014; Wenger et al., 2012).

Therefore, paying attention to the wishes of the elderly can be considered an important concern. However, it is important to know that besides the mentioned importance, there are issues that emphasize the need to study the wishes of the elderly more distinctly. One of these issues is the lack of studies and research on the elderly's wishes as one of their fundamental needs. More importantly, there are theories and concepts of aging that seem to overlook the elderly's wishes to some extent. For example, Erikson's theory on aging is based on the notion that an elderly person, after a brief review of their past life, judges their worth and, if they find their past unsatisfactory, will feel despair and hopelessness

(Santrock, 2002). Such thinking is focused on the present and ignores the current needs and wishes of the elderly for the future. In fact, Erikson considered mental health dependent on having a healthy past.

It must not be forgotten that initially understanding the needs of the elderly is not straightforward. Once the special conditions of the elderly and the situation they live in are understood, it becomes clear that empathizing with them and understanding their aspirations and wishes is a difficult task. In addition to this, conversations with various elderly individuals show that despite apparent similarities in their needs and wishes, these individuals speak of different desires and wishes. This can be attributed to individual differences among them. Indeed, individuals differ emotionally due to their different social, economic, and family situations. At an explanatory level, this issue can be justified by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1954). The social and economic conditions of individuals require that some remain at the basic needs level in their old age, while others are at the final stages, with their main wish being to achieve self-actualization and human perfection. Therefore, it is not possible to prescribe a uniform solution for the elderly, their needs, aspirations, and wishes without extensive and in-depth studies and to formulate policies based on them. Hence, it is necessary to address the issue of the elderly's wishes within a scientific framework, considering individual differences among the elderly.

However, to date, no research has studied the wishes of this group. The results of this research will contribute to the theoretical texts related to the psychology of aging. The findings of this study could be used to set up prevention programs for psychological problems based on desires. The outcome of this research could significantly help in adjusting the lifestyle of the elderly according to their desires and wishes. The result of this research could pave the way for further studies in this field. For this reason, the current research, given the sensitivity of the topic, i.e., examining the wishes of the elderly and considering their individual differences, as well as the existing research and theoretical gap, aimed to determine, in an exploratory study, what the wishes of the elderly are based on demographic variables (gender, marital status, economic status, social status, religion, number of children, age, type of care, and ethnicity).

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The aim of the present study was to investigate the wishes of the elderly based on demographic variables (gender, marital status, number of children, age, type of care, and ethnicity). This study, in terms of its objective, falls under basic research. Moreover, the approach of the present study was survey-based regarding the timing of data collection. In survey research, similar to the present study, the researcher examines the current conditions to clarify current issues. On the other hand, based on the nature of the data, the current study is classified as qualitative research and specifically phenomenological.

The research population consisted of all elderly individuals aged 70 to 100 years in Tehran. Since the research was qualitative, purposeful sampling was used, which is also known as non-probability, targeted, or qualitative sampling and means the deliberate selection of research units to gain knowledge or information. The goal is to better understand each phenomenon in a specific context. Reaching saturation in qualitative research is considered the gold standard for ending sampling, which in this study was achieved through constant comparison and no change in the existing categories and repetition of previous data.

Regarding the criteria and sufficiency for individuals' participation in the research, since the goal was not to generalize the results from the sample to the population, the description of the research topic was as legitimate as possible, and the sufficiency of sampling was determined through saturation. The reason for using this method was to ensure that participants in the research were those who could contribute to a correct understanding of the phenomenon of desire in old age, considering demographic variables. Thus, some samples were selected from elderly individuals in private and public centers, and others from elderly individuals living at home and under care.

Given that in this study the demographic characteristics of the sample were also significant, and since the research interview contained only one question and was not very lengthy; the sample size was increased to cover all demographic variables (100 elderly). Convenience sampling was selected. Overall, efforts were made to ensure the sample's reliability and appropriateness.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

In this study, given the nature of the topic and its methodology, phenomenological interviews were used. In this type of interview, the primary source of information is a deep and thorough interview in which the researcher and study participants collaboratively pursue the topic of interest. The researcher assists the participant in describing the desired phenomenon without directing or guiding the discussion. In this study, during the interview, the researcher attempted to uncover and understand the wishes of the elderly. If a question was not understood or an irrelevant answer was given, the question was repeated, but if the misunderstanding persisted, the sample was excluded and replaced with a new one. The average duration of the interview from initiation to completion was about 15 minutes.

2.3. Data analysis

To analyze the data to answer the question of what wishes the elderly have, an interpretive analysis method was used, and the following steps, based on the 7-step method of Colaizzi (Khodaverdian et al., 2020), were performed on the collected data:

- 1) Careful reading of all wishes to empathize with participants in order to understand them.
- 2) Extraction of important sentences related to the wishes.
- 3) Conceptualization of extracted significant sentences.
- 4) Extracted concepts for the wishes were repeated for repetitive wishes.
- 5) All extracted concepts from the wishes were organized into specific thematic categories.
- 6) A complete and comprehensive description of the phenomenon of desire in the form of emerged categories.
- 7) Returning to participants and rechecking the findings to authenticate the findings.

3. Findings and Results

The maximum age of participants was 100 and the minimum age was 70. 73% were married, and 27% were unmarried. 50% of the elderly had below high school education, 35% had a high school diploma, and 15% had above high school education. 67% were female, and 33% were male. 45% lived in private elderly centers, 30% in public centers, and 25% at home.

Consequently, all interviews were transcribed, followed by primary and secondary coding, and finally, the

categorization of wishes was generally performed. The next step involved the extraction of categories among the elderly's wishes based on demographic variables.

Table 1

Overall Categorization of Wishes Among the Elderly

Category Title	Secondary Coding and Grouping	Number of Repetitions	Total Repetitions
Desire for Death	Wish for death	21 times	44 times
	Without a wish	15 times	
	Wish for a burial place	3 times	
	Wish for an easy death	5 times	
Health and Happiness	Wish for health for everyone	23 times	71 times
	Wish for one's own health	5 times	
	Wish for youth's health	6 times	
	Wish for children's health	9 times	
	Wish for caregivers' health	4 times	
	Wish for self-recovery and treatment	13 times	
	Wish for health	11 times	
Seeking Meaning	Wish to perform religious rituals	3 times	38 times
	Wish to meet God	2 times	
	Wish to go to heaven	2 times	
	Wish for pilgrimage to religious places	7 times	
	Wish for forgiveness of sins by God	9 times	
	Wish for people to forgive mistakes	8 times	
	Wish for an easy death	5 times	
	Wish to meet the Imam of Time	2 times	
Family Desires	Wish to return home	13 times	53 times
	Wish to have a daughter	1 time	
	Wish for children and grandchildren's marriage	3 times	
	Wish for remarriage	2 times	
	Wish for spouse's life	3 times	
	Wish to live with children and togetherness	4 times	
	Wish for children's health and happiness	9 times	
	Wish for forgiveness of mistakes by spouse	3 times	
	Wish for childbearing by child	2 times	
	Wish to see children	13 times	
Worldly Desires	Wish to return to childhood	1 time	33 times
	Wish to return to youth	3 times	
	Wish for non-religious travel	2 times	
	Wish for a job and business prosperity	4 times	
	Wish to be informed of the outside world	1 time	
	Wish for remarriage	2 times	
	Wish to return to birthplace	12 times	
	Wish for affection	1 time	
	Wish for personal progress	1 time	
	Wish for independence	3 times	
Homeland Desires	Wish to meet friends	2 times	9 times
	Wish for the country's progress	6 times	
Personal Security	Wish for national security	3 times	1 time
	Wish for harm avoidance	1 time	

As observed in Table 1, a total of seven categories were extracted from secondary coding, titled: wishing for death, health and happiness, seeking meaning, family desires, world desires, security wishes, homeland desires, and personal security wishes. Health-related wishes, with 71 repetitions, had the highest occurrence. The reason for

choosing this title for the category was that it encompassed a variety of wishes related to health, well-being, and happiness in general, for the elderly themselves, their children, everyone, the youth, and their offspring. Additionally, in this collection of wishes, some elderly expressed desires for recovery and treatment.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research aimed to qualitatively investigate the wishes of the elderly, focusing on 100 seniors using a phenomenological approach. Interpretive analysis of the data obtained from the interviews after secondary coding revealed seven categories: desire for death, health and happiness, seeking meaning, family desire, worldly desires, security wishes, homeland desires, and the wish for personal security. Health-related wishes were the most prevalent. The second rank was attributed to family desires. The third rank in the repetition of categories was related to the desire for death, the fourth to seeking meaning, the fifth category was worldly desires, the sixth was homeland desires, and the last category was personal security.

The occurrence of health-related desires can be explained by considering that health poverty and disability increase with age, highlighting a set of health issues during old age (Simmons et al., 2021). Thus, the loss of physical and mental abilities seems to accentuate the focus on health. Therefore, the need for health and its diminishing effects on the lives of the elderly have made this category more recurrent among wishes than others. Research indicates that arthritis is the most common problem in this age. Other significant limitations in old age include heart diseases (52%), diabetes (34%), and shortness of breath (27%) (Simon & Chen, 2002). In this age period, since all individuals suffer from some form of health weakness, they intensely feel its presence as necessary for having other wishes and carrying out other life activities. Therefore, they wish it for themselves and others (Balasundram et al., 2023; Simmons et al., 2021).

Explaining the second rank's allocation to family desires, family and social supports play a significant role in the physical and psychological health of the elderly (Nazem et al., 2008; Rürup et al., 2005; Simmons et al., 2021). Additionally, the reduction in family interactions, loneliness, loss of cognitive abilities, and subsequently, job capabilities make them feel lonelier. Naturally, according to this feeling of loneliness, family wishes may form so that they seek roots, experiences, and have desires according to family. It seems clear to the elderly that family is one of the best groups that can effectively address their disabilities and loneliness (Marshall et al., 2014; Minamiguchi & Suzuki, 2019). Anyway, the category of family desires among the elderly indicates their need for more social support. Moreover, the high repetition of family desires reflects a cultural background and the importance of family in Iranian

culture, which is manifested in the wishes of the elderly. It appears natural for Iranians to focus their energy on the family, so this concern persists into old age and is expressed in their wishes. Thus, since one of the important factors in life satisfaction is social support, and family is a significant source, the repetition of family wishes is high, and secondly, this repetition rate signifies Iranians' attachment to family at different life stages.

Explaining the third rank's allocation to the desire for death, it should be said that since the elderly think about death frequently and talk about it, they have a slight fear of dying. When death anxiety was measured across different age groups (young adults aged 18-26, middle-aged individuals 36-50 years old, and seniors 60 years and older), it was found that death anxiety was highest among middle-aged individuals and lowest among seniors (Balasundram et al., 2023; Rürup et al., 2005). It appears that the elderly's awareness that old age is the end of life, witnessing the death of other seniors, declining health, increased loneliness, loss of job and family positions, and diminished role in decision-making lead to the formation of death-related wishes.

Explaining the allocation of the fourth rank to seeking-meaning wishes, since spirituality is a natural and, at the same time, a cultural matter in Iran, it is natural for individuals to seek activities that bring them closer to God. Seeking meaning reduces death anxiety and increases psychological well-being (Jobehdari et al., 2018). Additionally, spirituality and seeking meaning increase the satisfaction of the elderly. Religion also helps seniors better cope with unavoidable events. Research also shows that religion contributes to longer life and health (Banisi, 2019; Jobehdari et al., 2018; Moradi et al., 2019). Therefore, those who pay attention to religious matters and perhaps try to fill their loneliness, disabilities, and depressions with God, thinking about matters pleasing to God, which is reflected in their wishes. Moreover, seeking meaning helps them accept the pressures of old age with more satisfaction.

Explaining the allocation of the fifth category to worldly desires, one of the reasons for thinking about worldly desires might be the increased life expectancy resulting from improved living standards, which causes them to have more concerns about their quality of life and desires for improving their living conditions. However, part of the wishes in this category is entirely unrealistic, where desires take on a regretful dimension, such as wishes to return to childhood or youth. Therefore, this group has a more precise insight into life, judges life issues better, and is less interested in worldly matters because they understand their impermanence. Also,

a look at the wishes in this category shows that none of these wishes have a dimension of social prestige or power-seeking and are more individual-centered without caring about others' judgments about their wishes. Additionally, these wishes help individuals maintain productivity in their lives. On the other hand, worldly desires appropriate for age, which do not have a dimension of regret, require cognitive abilities that can also help solve life issues (Moradi et al., 2019; Simmons et al., 2021).

Explaining the allocation of the sixth category to homeland desires, in these wishes, seniors think entirely beyond the individual and desire things that encompass everyone (Borhaninejad et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2022). Perhaps this group spends more of their leisure time with national and international news, possibly have higher education than others, and may have been interested in political and social matters in their youth. This subject requires a more precise analysis of the data.

The last category's repetition was related to personal security and harm avoidance, which was only mentioned by one of the elderly. This wish could stem from past pessimisms, dissatisfaction with others' treatment, or one of the symptoms related to old age diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's (Dhana et al., 2022; Dupont et al., 2023).

Considering what has been said, it can be stated that the most important wishes among the elderly are health and family desires. Given that the World Health Organization's five wishes, namely the wish to have someone for medical decisions in case of incapacity, the wish for the preferred treatment, the wish for the preferred method of care, the wish for who and where to be treated in case of illness, and the wish for post-death plans, are all related to health, medical services, and death, they align with the wishes of the elderly in Iran, especially since one of the elderly's wishes is the desire for death, and the fifth wish of the elderly according to the World Health Organization is post-death wishes. However, it seems that the need for love and being loved and

attachment is manifested in family wishes in old age. Therefore, it is necessary for the elderly's programs to be arranged so that seniors, both outside and inside the home, can have meetings with their families based on planned and impromptu programs. Additionally, interested philanthropists for seniors inside nursing homes should play the role of the family and regularly arrange programs for visiting the elderly.

Acknowledgments

The Authors express their gratitude to all the participants in the research.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of the study declare no conflict of interest related to the research.

Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally in this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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