

A Gender-Based Analysis of Life Satisfaction, Psychological Well-Being, and Death Anxiety in Middle-Aged Adults

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ABSTRACT: Life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety represent interconnected dimensions of adult psychosocial functioning, particularly during middle adulthood when individuals increasingly confront questions concerning aging, purpose, health, mortality, and future life circumstances. This research-and-review article develops a gender-sensitive analytical framework for examining the relationships among these constructs in adults approaching later life. Drawing exclusively on the supplied literature, the study synthesizes evidence concerning life satisfaction, psychological well-being, meaning in life, spirituality, resilience, death anxiety, and gender differences in well-being. The analysis is theoretically positioned through life-satisfaction perspectives, meaning-oriented approaches, spirituality-related models, and Terror Management Theory. Particular attention is given to the possibility that death anxiety is not an isolated psychological outcome but may interact with meaning in life, psychological hardiness, resilience, and perceived well-being. The reviewed literature indicates that stronger meaning-oriented and psychosocial resources are generally associated with more adaptive psychological functioning, whereas heightened death anxiety may undermine aspects of well-being. Gender should therefore be treated as an analytical dimension rather than merely a demographic control variable. The article proposes an integrated gender-sensitive model in which life satisfaction and psychological well-being are examined alongside death anxiety and potentially protective resources such as meaning in life, spirituality, resilience, and ego integrity. The framework contributes to a more multidimensional understanding of psychological adaptation during middle adulthood while identifying methodological limitations and directions for future empirical research.

KEYWORDS: Life Satisfaction, Psychological Well-Being, Death Anxiety, Gender Differences, Middle Adulthood, Meaning in Life, Resilience, Spirituality, Mortality Awareness.

1. Introduction

Middle adulthood is a psychologically significant period in which individuals may experience changing social roles, family responsibilities, health concerns, occupational transitions, and increasing awareness of aging and mortality. Although life satisfaction is frequently conceptualized as a broad evaluation of one's life, psychological well-being reflects a wider range of positive psychological functioning. Death anxiety introduces a different dimension because it concerns emotional and cognitive responses to mortality. Examining these constructs jointly can therefore provide a more comprehensive account of psychological adaptation than considering any one variable independently.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale established a concise approach for assessing an individual's global cognitive evaluation of life circumstances (Diener et al., 1985). Life

satisfaction is consequently distinct from momentary affect: an individual may experience temporary stress while nevertheless evaluating life positively. The World Happiness Report similarly situates well-being within broader assessments of how individuals evaluate their lives and societies in which they live (Helliwell et al., 2021). Such perspectives establish life satisfaction as an important outcome for psychological and social research.

Psychological well-being is particularly relevant because positive functioning cannot be reduced to happiness alone. Research concerning spirituality, religiosity, meaning, and psychological functioning suggests that individuals' interpretations of life may influence their capacity to experience psychological adjustment (Garssen et al., 2021; Khan & Watson, 2021). Among older populations, spirituality has also been associated with psychological well-being, reinforcing the importance of meaning-oriented resources when considering adaptation to aging and mortality-related

concerns (Kwag & Hong, 2023).

Death anxiety represents a potentially contrasting psychological process. Whereas life satisfaction involves an evaluation of one's life as a whole, death anxiety involves apprehension concerning mortality. Dursun et al. (2022) demonstrated the relevance of meaning in life and psychological hardiness in understanding death anxiety, indicating that mortality-related concerns should be considered alongside broader psychological resources rather than examined in isolation. Similarly, research on death anxiety and resilience indicates that individual psychological resources and attachment-related characteristics can influence responses to mortality awareness (Bergman, 2024).

Gender adds another important analytical dimension. The OECD's discussion of gender gaps in well-being demonstrates that well-being outcomes can differ across genders and that such differences require systematic examination rather than assumptions about uniform psychological experiences (OECD, 2021). Consequently, gender-based analysis can help determine whether the relationships among life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety operate similarly across groups.

The principal objective of this article is therefore to develop an integrated analytical understanding of the relationships among life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety in middle-aged adults, with particular attention to gender differences. A secondary objective is to examine whether meaning in life, spirituality, resilience, psychological hardiness, and related constructs provide theoretically meaningful explanations for differences in psychological adjustment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Life Satisfaction as an Indicator of Subjective Evaluation

Life satisfaction is fundamentally an individual's cognitive assessment of the quality of their life. Diener et al. (1985) developed the Satisfaction With Life Scale to measure this global evaluation, providing an established foundation for studying subjective well-being. Importantly, life satisfaction does not simply measure the presence or absence of negative psychological states. Rather, it captures an individual's judgment regarding whether life as experienced corresponds sufficiently with personal expectations and standards.

Karataş et al. (2021) demonstrated the interconnectedness of life satisfaction with meaning in life and hope in the context of COVID-19 fear. This

finding is conceptually important for mortality-related research because it suggests that threatening circumstances do not necessarily influence well-being directly; meaning-related and future-oriented psychological resources may shape how threats are interpreted.

The broader well-being perspective presented by Helliwell et al. (2021) further supports the importance of subjective evaluation as an outcome of psychological and social functioning. However, life satisfaction should not be interpreted as synonymous with psychological well-being. An individual may report relatively high satisfaction while simultaneously experiencing specific concerns, including fear of death.

2.2 Psychological Well-Being, Meaning, and Spirituality

Psychological well-being represents a broader construct involving positive psychological functioning and adaptive experiences. Research examining spirituality and religion suggests that meaning systems may contribute to mental health and psychological adjustment (Garssen et al., 2021). Khan and Watson (2021), focusing on South Asian populations, likewise emphasized the relevance of religiosity, spirituality, and psychological well-being.

Meaning in life is particularly important because it may provide a framework through which individuals interpret aging, adversity, and mortality. Greenblatt-Kimron et al. (2022) proposed an integrative model of meaning in life among older adults, reinforcing the argument that meaning should be examined as a multidimensional psychological resource rather than as a peripheral characteristic.

Piedmont's (1999) work on spiritual transcendence provides an additional conceptual foundation. Spiritual transcendence may shape how individuals interpret experiences beyond immediate personal concerns. In the context of mortality, such an orientation could potentially alter the emotional meaning assigned to death without necessarily eliminating awareness of mortality.

2.3 Death Anxiety and Psychological Resources

Death anxiety is not simply fear of a future event; it may represent a broader response to uncertainty, loss of control, personal finitude, and existential concerns. Terror Management Theory provides an important theoretical foundation by proposing that awareness of mortality can generate psychological responses aimed at preserving meaning, identity, and psychological security (Pyszczynski et al., 2015).

Dursun et al. (2022) provide particularly important evidence for the present framework because their analysis directly connects death anxiety with meaning in

life and psychological hardiness. Their findings support the conceptualization of mortality anxiety within a network of psychological resources. In this perspective, individuals possessing stronger meaning structures or greater psychological hardiness may respond differently to mortality-related thoughts than individuals with fewer psychological resources.

Bergman (2024) extends this perspective by examining death anxiety and resilience while considering attachment patterns as a moderating factor. This indicates that death anxiety should not automatically be interpreted as an invariant characteristic. Its psychological significance may depend on interpersonal and intrapersonal resources.

Bharti and Bharti (2024) further connect death anxiety with psychological well-being and successful aging among older adults with chronic illness. Although this population differs from the middle-aged population emphasized in the present article, the study is theoretically relevant because it illustrates how mortality concerns can intersect with well-being and adaptation during aging.

2.4 Gender as an Analytical Dimension

Gender differences in well-being deserve explicit examination because social experiences, psychological resources, and perceptions of aging may not be distributed uniformly across genders. OECD (2021) provides a broader empirical basis for considering gender gaps in well-being. However, the supplied literature does not establish a single universal direction for gender differences in death anxiety, life satisfaction, or psychological well-being.

This absence is itself important. A rigorous gender analysis should not assume beforehand that one gender will necessarily experience higher or lower death anxiety or greater life satisfaction. Instead, gender should be incorporated into empirical models through group comparisons, interaction terms, or moderation analyses.

2.5 Research Gap

The supplied literature contains substantial discussion of individual components of the proposed framework, including life satisfaction, psychological well-being, death anxiety, meaning, spirituality, resilience, and gender-related well-being. However, relatively less attention is evident in the supplied references to the simultaneous examination of all three primary constructs—life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety—specifically among adults in middle adulthood and through an explicit gender-comparative framework.

The present study addresses this conceptual gap by

positioning death anxiety not merely as a negative outcome but as a variable that may interact with life evaluation and psychological functioning. It further incorporates meaning-oriented and resilience-related variables as explanatory resources.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This article adopts a structured research-and-review design based exclusively on the references supplied for the study. The methodological purpose is analytical synthesis rather than the production of fabricated primary-data statistics. The literature was organized around five domains: life satisfaction, psychological well-being, death anxiety, psychological resources, and gender differences.

The analytical framework treats life satisfaction and psychological well-being as major indicators of positive functioning, while death anxiety represents a mortality-related psychological concern. Meaning in life, spirituality, psychological hardiness, resilience, and related constructs are considered potential explanatory or protective mechanisms.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework can be represented as:

Gender → Life Satisfaction

Gender → Psychological Well-Being

Gender → Death Anxiety

while simultaneously considering:

Meaning in Life / Spirituality / Resilience / Psychological Hardiness → Death Anxiety

and

Life Satisfaction ↔ Psychological Well-Being ↔ Death Anxiety

The bidirectional notation reflects theoretical interconnectedness rather than a claim of experimentally established causality.

Life satisfaction is operationally conceptualized through global subjective evaluation, consistent with the Satisfaction With Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985). Psychological well-being is treated as broader positive psychological functioning. Death anxiety refers to psychological apprehension associated with mortality. Meaning, spirituality, resilience, and hardiness are conceptualized as potentially protective psychological resources.

3.3 Proposed Research Questions

The framework supports four principal research questions. First, do life satisfaction levels differ between gender groups among middle-aged adults? Second, are there gender differences in psychological well-being? Third, does death anxiety demonstrate a meaningful relationship with life satisfaction and psychological well-being? Fourth, do meaning in life, spirituality, resilience, or psychological hardiness help explain variations in death anxiety?

3.4 Proposed Analytical Strategy

For future primary-data implementation, descriptive statistics should first establish the distributions of life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety across gender groups. Independent-group comparisons could then assess whether statistically significant differences exist.

Correlation analysis could examine the direction and magnitude of relationships among the three principal constructs. Multiple regression could subsequently determine whether life satisfaction and psychological well-being predict death anxiety after accounting for relevant psychological resources.

A more advanced model could test gender as a moderator. Conceptually:

$$\text{Death Anxiety} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Life Satisfaction}) + \beta_2(\text{Psychological Well-Being}) + \beta_3(\text{Gender}) + \beta_4(\text{Life Satisfaction} \times \text{Gender}) + \beta_5(\text{Psychological Well-Being} \times \text{Gender}) + \varepsilon$$

Such a model would determine whether relationships between psychological functioning and death anxiety differ across genders rather than merely determining whether average scores differ.

3.5 Theoretical Integration

Terror Management Theory provides the mortality-related foundation of the framework (Pyszczynski et al., 2015). Meaning-oriented perspectives provide an explanation for why mortality awareness may produce different psychological consequences across individuals. Dursun et al. (2022) are especially important in this respect because meaning in life and psychological hardiness provide mechanisms through which death anxiety may be understood.

Spirituality represents another possible interpretive resource. Research by Garssen et al. (2021), Khan and Watson (2021), and Kwag and Hong (2023) supports the relevance of spirituality and religion to psychological functioning. However, spirituality should not be treated as automatically protective for every individual; its relationship with well-being may depend on how spiritual beliefs are experienced and integrated into personal meaning systems.

Resilience provides another potential buffer. Bergman (2024) illustrates how resilience can be examined alongside death anxiety, while Busch (2024) highlights generativity and ego integrity as pathways associated with more accepting attitudes toward death. These findings collectively suggest that psychological adaptation to mortality may involve developmental resources rather than merely the suppression of fear.

4. Results / Findings

Because no original participant-level dataset was supplied, the findings presented here constitute an analytical synthesis of the provided literature rather than statistical findings from a new sample.

The first major finding is that life satisfaction and psychological well-being should be treated as related but conceptually distinct indicators of positive functioning. The Satisfaction With Life Scale provides a focused measure of global life evaluation (Diener et al., 1985), whereas the broader literature on psychological well-being incorporates additional dimensions of positive functioning. This distinction is essential because an individual may evaluate life positively while simultaneously experiencing mortality-related concerns.

The second finding concerns the central role of meaning-oriented resources. Dursun et al. (2022) directly connect meaning in life and psychological hardiness with death anxiety, supporting the proposition that mortality concerns are influenced by broader psychological structures. Similarly, Greenblatt-Kimron et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of meaning in life among older adults. Together, these findings suggest that the relationship between age-related mortality awareness and psychological functioning may be mediated or moderated by the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as meaningful.

Third, the literature indicates that death anxiety has potential implications for psychological well-being. Bharti and Bharti (2024) explicitly examined the relationship between death anxiety, psychological well-being, and successful aging. Bergman (2024) further demonstrates the relevance of resilience and attachment patterns to death anxiety. These studies suggest that death anxiety should be incorporated into multidimensional psychological models rather than examined as an isolated fear variable.

Fourth, spirituality emerges as a potentially relevant explanatory resource. Research by Garssen et al. (2021), Khan and Watson (2021), and Kwag and Hong (2023) collectively indicates an association between spirituality or religion and psychological functioning. Piedmont (1999) provides a personality-oriented conceptualization of spiritual transcendence, suggesting that individuals may differ in the extent to which they orient toward

experiences that transcend immediate self-concerns.

Finally, the literature supports gender as a meaningful analytical category but does not justify assuming a predetermined gender hierarchy in psychological outcomes. OECD (2021) demonstrates the relevance of gender gaps in well-being, while the supplied literature does not establish a universal direction for gender differences in death anxiety. Therefore, the most defensible conclusion is that gender differences should be empirically tested rather than presumed.

Overall, the literature-derived findings support an integrated model in which life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety are interconnected and influenced by meaning, resilience, spirituality, and other psychological resources.

5. Discussion

The central implication of the synthesis is that mortality awareness should be interpreted within the broader psychological ecology of middle adulthood. A narrow interpretation would treat death anxiety as a negative emotional state requiring direct reduction. The literature instead suggests a more complex process in which individuals' responses to mortality depend partly on meaning, psychological hardiness, resilience, spirituality, and developmental resources.

The relationship between death anxiety and well-being is particularly important. If death anxiety is associated with diminished psychological well-being, interventions should not necessarily focus exclusively on reducing fear. A meaning-centered approach may be more theoretically appropriate because Dursun et al. (2022) link meaning in life and psychological hardiness with death anxiety. This implies that psychological adaptation may be strengthened by helping individuals construct coherent interpretations of their lives rather than simply attempting to eliminate mortality-related thoughts.

Busch (2024) provides a complementary developmental perspective through generativity, ego integrity, and death acceptance. These concepts are especially relevant to middle adulthood because this period can involve reflection on personal achievements, contributions to others, family continuity, and future generations. The implication is that positive engagement with mortality may coexist with strong psychological functioning.

Spirituality also presents both opportunities and methodological challenges. Garssen et al. (2021) and Khan and Watson (2021) support the relevance of spirituality and religiosity to mental health and psychological well-being, while Piedmont (1999)

provides a broader personality-based perspective. However, researchers should avoid assuming that spirituality produces uniformly positive outcomes. Its psychological effects may depend on individual interpretation and social context.

Gender requires similar caution. The existence of gender gaps in well-being, as discussed by OECD (2021), justifies comparative analysis, but it does not establish that one gender will invariably experience higher life satisfaction or lower death anxiety. Differences may emerge from social roles, resources, coping patterns, or culturally shaped expectations. Therefore, gender should be tested as both a grouping variable and a potential moderator.

Several limitations must be recognized. First, the supplied evidence includes substantial research involving older adults rather than exclusively adults aged 45–60. Generalizing findings from older populations to middle adulthood must therefore be undertaken cautiously. Second, the literature varies considerably in context and methodology. Third, associations among variables should not be interpreted as causal relationships. Fourth, the present article does not introduce original participant data and consequently cannot claim statistically significant gender differences in a newly recruited sample.

Despite these limitations, the proposed framework provides a useful foundation for empirical research. A future study could recruit balanced gender groups within the 45–60 age range and measure life satisfaction, psychological well-being, death anxiety, meaning in life, spirituality, and resilience. Such a design would allow researchers to determine whether psychological resources operate differently across gender groups and whether death anxiety independently predicts well-being after relevant variables are controlled.

6. Conclusion

This article develops a gender-sensitive framework for understanding the relationship among life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and death anxiety in middle-aged adults. The literature indicates that these constructs should not be studied independently. Life satisfaction represents a global evaluation of one's life, psychological well-being reflects broader positive functioning, and death anxiety represents a mortality-related psychological concern.

The synthesis further demonstrates the importance of meaning in life, psychological hardiness, resilience, spirituality, generativity, and ego integrity in explaining how individuals respond to mortality-related awareness. In particular, Dursun et al. (2022) provide an important conceptual bridge between meaning, psychological hardiness, and death anxiety, while research on

resilience, spirituality, and developmental acceptance reinforces the multidimensional character of mortality adaptation.

The principal contribution of the proposed framework is its integration of positive psychological functioning and mortality-related anxiety within a gender-comparative model. Rather than assuming that death anxiety necessarily produces uniformly negative outcomes, the framework recognizes that its psychological impact may depend on the resources individuals possess for interpreting mortality and maintaining meaning.

Future empirical research should test gender differences directly using validated measures, balanced samples, correlational and regression techniques, and moderation or mediation models. Longitudinal designs would be particularly valuable because they could determine whether changes in life satisfaction, psychological well-being, meaning, and death anxiety occur together as individuals transition through later adulthood. Such research could ultimately support more precise psychological interventions focused not only on reducing mortality-related distress but also on strengthening meaning, resilience, and adaptive well-being.

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