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MEANING IN LIFE IN ELDERLY

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ABSTRACT — AIM: Starting from the research of the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, the meaning in life proved its importance, being studied in the context of different research traditions, existential psychology, positive psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology. This is a pilot study targeting a group of twenty elderly Romanians who live in a Residential Center in Bucharest. **METHODS:** The study assumes that we'll have statistically significant correlations between independent variables (presence of meaning, search for meaning) and dependent ones (depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction). **Method:** The research uses correlation analysis for the variables: meaning presence and meaning search from M. Steger's MLQ questionnaire, defined as independent variables in the study and dependent variables: depression, anxiety, stress (DASS-21 questionnaire), and life satisfaction (Satisfaction Scale with Life, SWLS). **RESULTS:** The research results highlight good internal consistency (Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha > 0.70$) for the two subscales of the M.L.Q. questionnaire. The statistically significant inverse link between the level of stress and the presence of meaning in life is confirmed, the statistically significant inverse link between the total score of depression and the presence of meaning in life is confirmed; the variable life satisfaction is the only dependent variable for which statistically significant links are confirmed with both independent variables simultaneously (presence of meaning in life and search for meaning of life); Pearson correlation coefficients are statistically significant, Sig values, associated, lower than the 5% threshold, require the rejection of the null hypothesis.

KEYWORDS — meaning in life, old age, mood, stress, depression, anxiety, satisfaction with life.

INTRODUCTION

According to Viktor Frankl's theory, people need to give meaning to life and this motivation he called *the desire for meaning* (Frankl, 1962). The personal values of the individual are generative of meaning (Braz & Moldovan, 2017; Strugar, 2018; Talos, 2021; Tudor et al., 2019). Viktor Frankl's psychotherapy (logotherapy) is based on the meaning in life, the personal significance of life at a moment in time.

This approach is continued by Michael F. Steger, who also focuses on the present meaning in life and the re-significance of events.

I decided to use as a research paradigm the *presence and search* model developed by Michael F. Steger, which assumes that the meaning of life is important to the human being; when people feel that their life is little significant, or when they lose meaning, they will seek it (Steger et al., 2008). Therefore, he agrees with Frankl's theory, which refers to the search for meaning as a primary human motivation.

The research results are important for the psychology of interpersonal relationships in old age and Romanian society today.

The central hypothesis of the study is that the meaning of life, the subjective perception of one's life history, its interpretation based on the system of personal values can lead to the conclusion that life is worth living or not, the mental balance reflected in a good general health, or a dysphoric mood dominated by anxiety-depression.

This study aims to correlate the meaning in life in old age, life satisfaction, and emotional balance. This pilot study opens an extensive study on the meaning in life in older adults.

METHODS

The subjects participating in the research, aged 56 to 88 (twenty persons), were selected from a residential Center in Bucharest, the criterion for including is the willingness to participate in tests and cognitive capacity.

The research hypothesis is that we'll have statistically significant correlations between independent variables (presence of meaning, search for meaning) and dependent ones (depression, anxiety, stress, satisfaction with life).

For the purpose of this research, the participants completed three questionnaires to assess their scores for the presence of meaning in life, the search for meaning in life, depression, anxiety, mental stress, and satisfaction with life.

The following questionnaires were filled:

— *The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (M.L.Q., Steger et al., 2009)*. This is a questionnaire of primary importance for general well-being (M. Steger et al., 2009), valid and reliable for assessing the meaning of life in different socio-demographic populations (Naghiyae et al., 2020), has a good internal consistency and Alpha Cronbach coefficients ranging from 0.81-0.86 for the *Presence of meaning* subscale and 0.84-0.92 for the *Search for meaning* subscale (Steger

et al., 2006), the validation in Romania on a sample of 320 students highlights a good internal coefficient Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$ for the *Presence of meaning* subscale and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$ for the *Search for meaning* subscale (Balgiu, 2020). The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (D.A.S.S.-21, Lovibond et al., 1995) is a set of three self-report scales designed to assess negative emotional states: depression, anxiety, and stress. This questionnaire can be used in research and clinical use in people over 17 years of age (Lovibond et al., 1995).

— **The Satisfaction with Life Scale (S.W.L.S., Diener et al., 1985).** The scale was developed to assess people's satisfaction with life as a whole. The scale has a good convergent validity with other scales and other types of subjective well-being assessments. Preliminary studies with S.W.L.S. reveals that life satisfaction is a significant and useful psychological concept in research (Diener et al., 1985).

RESULTS

Internal consistency analysis for the M.L.Q questionnaire: Cronbach's coefficient's $\alpha = 0.819$ for the *Presence of meaning* subscale and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$ for the *Search for meaning* subscale. Cronbach's α can take values between (0, 1), and the values obtained by us are > 0.70 considered the threshold in research for a good internal consistency of the scale. The Presence and Search subscales highlight a good internal consistency (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's coefficient α

Reliability Statistics PRESENCE SUBSCALE			Reliability Statistics SEARCH SUBSCALE		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on standardized Items	N	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on standardized Items	N
.819	.819	5	.814	.825	5

Regarding the average values, the presence of meaning in life has the highest value of all the variables analyzed, of 25.9 points, followed by the satisfaction with life, with an average of 22.1 points. The total anxiety score is the variable with the lowest average score of 6.2 points (Graph 1), a threshold corresponding to a normal level of anxiety. The average level of stress and depression is within normal limits.

The only average calculated representative for the study population is in the case of the score of the presence of meaning in life (Pearson's coefficient of variation below 30%). For the other variables analyzed, the coefficient of variation indicates that we are dealing with a heterogeneous sample for research.

Regarding the possible links between the analyzed variables, we want to validate the correlation between independent variables (presence of meaning in life, search for meaning in life) and those considered to be dependent (depression, anxiety, stress, satisfaction with life).

Pearson correlation coefficients are statistically significant, Sig values. associated, lower than the 5% threshold, require the rejection of the null hypothesis, for most pairs of tested variables, except for anxiety, for which the calculated coefficients are statistically insignificant.

Between the level of stress and the presence of meaning in life, the statistically significant negative connection of medium intensity is confirmed (coefficient of -0.47). If the scores of the presence of meaning in life will increase, the total scores of stress will decrease. There is no statistically significant link between stress levels and the search for meaning in life. Identically, between the total score of depression and the presence of meaning in life is confirmed the statistically significant correlation, negative, of medium intensity (coefficient of -0.651). If the scores of the presence of meaning in life will increase, the total scores of depression will decrease. There is no statistically significant link between the total score of depression and the search for meaning in life. The intensity of the statistical link between depression and the presence of meaning in life is the most intense, of all the combinations analyzed.

Satisfaction with life is the only dependent variable for which statistically significant links are confirmed with both independent variables simultaneously (presence of meaning in life and search for meaning in life). Both links are of medium intensity (coefficient of 0.506 and -0.46 , respectively), the difference is the direction of the connection, positive connection with the presence of meaning in life, negative with the search for meaning in life (Table 3). Therefore, if the scores of the presence of meaning in life will increase, the total scores of satisfaction in life will increase also.

DISCUSSION

The research hypothesis is confirmed, except for the total level of anxiety, which does not correlate

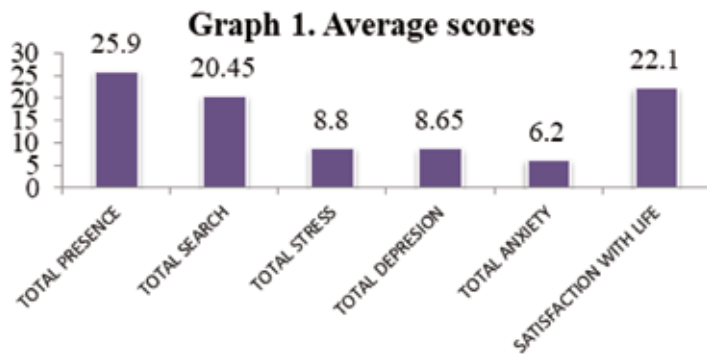


Fig. 1. Average scores [SPSS]

Table 3. Pearson linear correlation coefficients [Source: SPSS]

	Total Presence	Total Search
Total Stress	-0.47*	0.28
Total Depression	-0.65**	0.23
Total Anxiety	0.38	0.39
Satisfaction with life	0.50*	-0.46*

Note: ** statistically significant at the 1% threshold

* statistically significant at the 5% threshold

with any of the independent variables. For the other combinations tested, except for life satisfaction, the rest of the dependent variables do not correlate with the search for meaning in life.

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics at the sample level [Source: SPSS]

	Average	Median	Standard Deviation	Coef. Vari.	N (sample)
Total Presence	25.90	27.50	7.67	29.61%	20
Total Search	20.45	22.00	8.02	39.23%	20
Total Stress	8.80	7.50	5.01	56.95%	20
Total Depression	8.65	7.00	6.55	75.79%	20
Total Anxiety	6.20	5.00	5.03	81.18%	20
Satisfaction with life	22.10	23.50	10.04	45.43%	20