



## **SUBJECTIVE AGE IDENTITY & PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN TURKISH ELDERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined subjective age identity and the relationship between subjective age identity and psychological well-being in a Turkish sample of older adults. The sample was comprised of 60 Turkish elders aged 59 to 103 years. The results indicated that the participants felt significantly younger than their chronological ages and believed that they were treated as significantly younger than their ages. In addition, those who held older subjective age identities tended to have higher scores on depression and lower scores on life satisfaction. Self-esteem was not related to subjective age identity.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Previous research related to subjective age identity (i.e., the age one feels) has suggested that older adults maintain subjective age identities that are younger than their actual age (e.g., Barrett, 2005; Hubley & Hultsch, 1994; Montepare & Lachman, 1989). However, relatively little research has explored whether these findings can be generalized to other cultures outside of North America. Thus far, research comparing subjective age findings in Finland (Uotinen, 1998), Japan (Ota, Harwood, Williams, & Takai, 2000), and Germany (Westerhof, Barrett, & Steverink, 2003) to those in the U.S. found that, although each group tended to feel younger than their actual age, this was particularly the case for Americans. George, Mutran, and Pennypacker (1980) suggested that subjective age may be a more important influence on psychological well-being than chronological age. Individuals who identified themselves as older than their actual age tended to be less happy and reported lower satisfaction with their lives (Logan, Ward, & Spitze, 1992). Furthermore, individuals who identified themselves as younger than their actual age tended to have better psychological adjustment (Barak & Stern, 1986; Linn & Hunter, 1979). With the exception of Westerhof and Barrett (2005), who recently reported younger subjective ages were related to higher life satisfaction and positive affect in a German sample, little research has explored such relationships outside of the United States.

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to examine (a) subjective age identity, (b) gender differences in subjective age identity, and (c) the relationship between subjective age identity and measures of psychological well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, depression, self-esteem) in a Turkish sample of older adults.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample was comprised of 60 Turkish elders aged 59 to 103 years ( $M = 78.1$ ,  $SD = 8.69$ ) residing in two seniors' houses in Istanbul, Turkey. Nearly 76% of the sample was female. In terms of educational level, 25% of the participants indicated that they did not complete high school, 13.3% completed high school, 35% had some post-secondary education, and 26.7% had a university or a post graduate level degree.

### Procedure

The participants completed a demographic form and the following questionnaires in Turkish:

**Subjective Age Identity Scale** (Michalos, Hubble, Zumbo, & Hemingway, 2001): measures physical age, mental age, social age, look age, desired age, and the age one is treated. Based on a factor analysis, using principal axis factoring, a mean subjective age identity score was computed for each participant by averaging the scores on the physical age, mental age, social age, look age, and desired age items, with higher scores indicating older subjective age identities ( $\alpha = .82$ ). The 'age one is treated' item was used as a separate measure. Subjective age identity and 'age one is treated' were correlated  $.39$  ( $p < .01$ ). Neither the subjective age identity nor 'age one is treated' variables were significantly correlated with chronological age ( $r = .08$  and  $r = .17$ ,  $n.s.$ , respectively).

**Satisfaction with Life Scale** (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Yetim, 1993): is a measure of the degree to which individuals are satisfied with their current life ( $\alpha = .67$ ).

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (Çuhadaroğlu, 1985; Rosenberg, 1965): assesses global self-esteem ( $\alpha = .54$ ).

**Geriatric Depression Scale** (Ertan, Eker, & Şar, 1997; Yesavage et al., 1983): is a screening measure of depressive symptomatology in older adults ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean scores for subjective age identity and 'age one is treated'.

Two one sample t-tests, comparing the mean scores of subjective age identity and 'age one is treated' to a rating of 3 ('about the same as my age'), were performed to determine whether Turkish seniors, on average, maintained significantly different subjective age identities than their chronological ages. The results indicated that seniors' subjective age identities were significantly younger than their ages,  $t(56) = -3.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .51$ , and they believed that they were treated as significantly younger than their ages,  $t(54) = -3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .52$ .

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the scores of females and males on subjective age identity and 'age one is treated' variables. There were no significant gender differences on subjective age identity,  $t(54) = -.31$ ,  $p = .76$ ,  $d = .10$  or the 'age one is treated',  $t(52) = -.63$ ,  $p = .53$ ,  $d = .20$ .

Figures 1 and 2 show the relationships among the subjective age measures and the psychological well-being variables. Participants who held younger subjective age identities tended to have higher life satisfaction scores and lower depression scores. There was no significant relationship between subjective age identity and self-esteem. Similarly, those who believed that they were treated as younger than their chronological age tended to have higher life satisfaction scores and a trend toward lower depression scores. There was no significant relationship between 'age one is treated' and self-esteem.

## DISCUSSION

This appears to be the first study to evaluate subjective age identity with a Turkish sample. Our results indicated that Turkish elders reported subjective age identities that were younger than their actual age and believed that they were treated as younger than their age. This is consistent with previous subjective age research with older adults (e.g., Hubley & Hultsch, 1994; Montepare & Lachman, 1989; Westerhof et al., 2003). Similar to many studies (e.g., Baum & Boxley, 1983; Hubley & Hultsch, 1994; Uotinen, 1998), we found no gender differences in the subjective age identity measures. A younger subjective age identity was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depressive symptomatology. Thus, the findings with Turkish elders were similar to those found with North American (Logan et al., 1992) and German seniors (Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). Self-esteem was not found to be related to subjective age identity. More research is needed that examines (a) the relationships between subjective age and different indicators of well-being, and (b) cross-cultural comparisons of aging and age identity.

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Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Subjective Age Identity and Age One is Treated Variables by Gender*

Variable	Males	Females	Total Sample
Subjective age identity	2.57 (.85)	2.65 (.71)	2.62 (.74)
Age one is treated	2.42 (.90)	2.60 (.86)	2.55 (.86)

Note. Possible scores on the subjective age identity and 'age one is treated' variables ranged from 1 (*much younger than my age*) to 3 (*about the same as my age*) to 5 (*much older than my age*).

Figure 1. Correlations among Subjective Age Identity, Self-Esteem, Depression, and Life Satisfaction

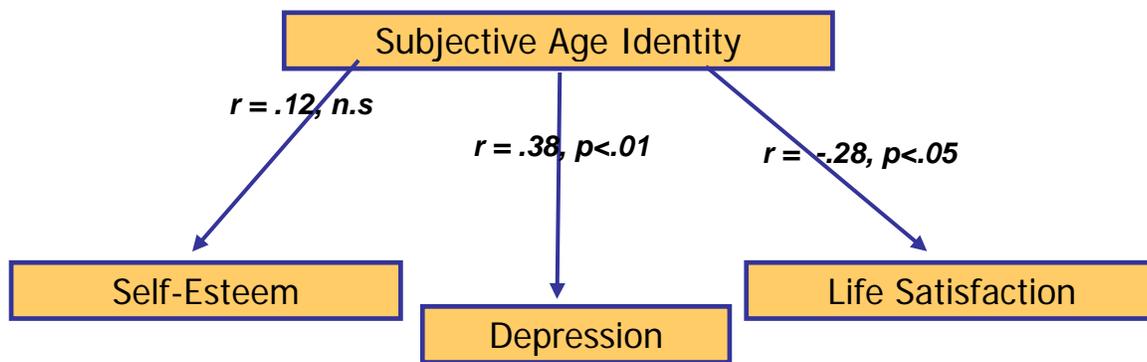


Figure 2. Correlations among Age One is Treated, Self-Esteem, Depression, and Life Satisfaction

