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#### RESEARCH

## INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN ELDERLY

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Intergenerational solidarity is defined as social cohesion between generations or intergenerational cohesion between parents and children once the children grow up and create their own families. This study investigates the effect of intergenerational solidarity on life satisfaction in parents of adults.

**Materials and Method:** The data were collected from parents of adults above 60 years of age. Participants in this study included 216 in parents of adults. The questionnaire used in this research consisted of 3 sections. The first section focussed on demographic information such as age, gender, marital status. In the second section, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al was used to measure the parents' satisfaction with life. The third section comprised the two subscales given by Bengtson and Schrader in the Intergenerational Solidarity Scale: affectual and functional solidarity.

**Results:** The average for affectual solidarity dimensions was 54.08, the average of functional solidarity dimensions was 12.26, the average of the standardised intergenerational solidarity scale was 66.35 and the average of the Satisfaction With Life Scale was 21.62.

**Conclusion:** When the Satisfaction With Life Scale was compared with affectual solidarity in moderating a positive linear relationship, results were  $r=0.401$ ,  $p<0.01$ . Between the Satisfaction With Life Scale and the standardised intergenerational solidarity average, a positive linear relationship was found to be insignificant ( $r=0.368$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

**Keywords:** Aging; Intergenerational relations; Life; Personal satisfaction

#### ARAŞTIRMA

## YAŞLILARDA KUŞAKLAR ARASI DAYANIŞMA VE YAŞAM TATMİNİ

### Öz

**Giriş:** Kuşaklar arası dayanışma, nesiller arası sosyal açıdan bütünlük ya da çocukları büyüyüp kendi ailelerini oluşturmadan önce ebeveyn ile çocukları arasında kuşaklararası bütünlük olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın amacı yetişkin ebeveynlerde kuşaklar arasındaki dayanışmanın yaşam kalitesine etkilerini belirlemektir.

**Gereç ve Yöntem:** Araştırmanın verileri 60 yaş ve üstü yaşlı ebeveynlerden toplanmıştır ve 216 yaşlı ebeveyn bu araştırmaya katılmıştır. Araştırmada kullanılan soru formu 3 bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde, yaş, cinsiyet, evlilik statüsü gibi demografik bilgiler bulunmaktadır. 2. bölümde yetişkin ebeveynlerin yaşam tatminlerini ölçmek amacıyla Diener ve arkadaşları tarafından geliştirilen Yaşam Tatmini ölçeği bulunmaktadır. 3. Bölümde Bengtson ve Schrader'in Nesiller Arası Dayanışma Ölçeğinin iki alt boyutu kullanılmıştır; Duygusal ve Fonksiyonel Dayanışma.

**Bulgular:** Duygusal Dayanışma alt boyutunun ortalaması 54,08, Fonksiyonel Dayanışma alt boyutunun ortalaması 12,26, standardize edilmiş nesiller arası dayanışma ölçeğinin ortalaması 66,35, Yaşamdan Duyulan Tatmin ölçeğinin ortalaması ise 21,62 bulunmuştur.

**Sonuç:** "Yaşamdan Duyulan Tatmin" ölçeği ile "Duygusal Dayanışma" arasında orta düzeyde pozitif yönde doğrusal bir ilişki ( $r:0,401$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). "Yaşamdan Duyulan Tatmin" ölçeği ile "Standardize edilmiş nesiller arası dayanışma ortalamasının" arasında ise zayıf düzeyde pozitif yönde doğrusal bir ilişki bulunmuştur ( $r:0,368$ ,  $p<0,01$ ).

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Yaşlanma; Kuşaklar arası ilişkiler; Yaşam; Kişisel tatmin

## INTRODUCTION

Average life expectancy has increased in all industrialised nations. These demographic change impacts families, rendering the lifetimes shared by parents and their children even more significant (1). Considering the consistent increase in the ageing populations and changes in family structures, norms and behaviours, the connection between intergenerational solidarity and the wellbeing of older parents takes on added significance (2).

Intergenerational solidarity can be described as intergenerational interactions in the family that represent sentiments, attitudes, and behaviors that bond family members across generations (3). Bengtson and Roberts (4) developed a conceptual framework for the study of inter-generational relations that is based on exchange theory: the 'inter-generational solidarity model'. It conceptualizes inter-generational family solidarity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon with six components associated with its structural, associational, affectual, consensual, functional and normative dimensions. Affectual solidarity which is one of the sub-dimensions of intergenerational solidarity is type and degree of positive sentiments (warmth, closeness, understanding, trust, respect, etc.) held about family members and ratings of perceived reciprocity in positive sentiments among family members (5). Functional solidarity which is another intergenerational solidarity dimension is concerned with the degree of intergenerational support and perception of reciprocity. Possible predictors of functional solidarity include affection, income, education, health status, family status, family size, birth order, and proximity (4).

Older parents and their adult children have significant roles in each other's lives. Since the 1940s, social gerontologists have focused on the association between intergenerational relations and older people's life satisfaction, happiness, morale and psychological well-being (6). In fact, life satisfaction is the situation or the result of comparison of expectations of a person (what one wants) and what one possesses (what one has). Therefore, many researchers are interested in examining the factors

influencing life satisfaction in older adults. The central goal for most people is obtaining a high level of life satisfaction, which refers to the subjective appraisal of one's life (7).

Intergenerational solidarity whether in the strict family context or in the broader societal context seems to be increasingly interesting nowadays. This justifies the application of the intergenerational solidarity model, the most important paradigm in social gerontology in the last three decades, to the study of the relationships between parents and emerging adults' children (8).

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study analyses the impact of intergenerational solidarity on life satisfaction in parents of adult children. The data for this study were collected from elderly people aged over 60 who have adult children and who are willing to undertake research. After obtaining the necessary permits from the Ankara governor, elderly people's number and address were obtained from different neighborhood headmen in the Çankaya district in Ankara, Turkey and face-to-face interview was conducted with 216 elderly people. Type of the study is quantitative research study.

The questionnaire used in the research consists of 3 parts. In the first chapter demographic information such as age, gender, marital status working status and perceived health status of parents of adult children are available.

In the second section, The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener et al. (9) is used to measure adult children's satisfaction with life. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) consists of 5 items that represents satisfaction with life (Ranging from 1 to 7; 1 strongly disagree, 7 strongly agree). The translation and adaptation of the scale to Turkish was made by Koker (10) and the confidence coefficient of the scale was calculated to be .82. In this research, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient has also been measured as 0.86.

In the third section, two subscales of Bengtson and Schrader's Intergenerational Solidarity Scale (3) is used; Affectual and Functional Solidarity. In



this research, validity and reliability studies were carried out for the Positive Affect Index and the Intergenerational Functional Solidarity Scale. For both scales, firstly the content validity of the scales was determined, and then reliability calculations were made by factor analysis. The texts translated by the experts into Turkish, again with the expert opinion, was translated back to English with the Method of Back-translation the meaning shifts that could arise from the translation were removed. As a result, it has been accepted that your parallels are provided for translation.

*The Affectual Solidarity: The Positive Affect Index (3) is used to measure the affectual solidarity or the family relations between older adults and adult children. The scale consists of 10 items concerning the degree of positive affect (understanding, fairness, trust, respect, and affection) toward and perceived by the other generation. In this study, older adults were asked if they felt they understood the referent child and if they felt the referent child understood them on a six-point scale (scale ranged from 1 to 6, "not well" to "extremely well"). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the construct validity. As a result of the analysis made, the value of KMO was determined as 0,669. The  $\chi^2$  value of the Bartlett test was 528,329 ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $sd = 10$ ). The total variance explained was determined as 58,389%. Lastly, the scale is consistent with the original scale. This scale is considered to be highly reliable with the 0.92 Cronbach Alpha (3). The reliability of the scale has also been measured as 0.912 in this study. The reliability results of this scale are highly reliable.*

In the Intergenerational Functional Solidarity Scale that consists of 5 items, 4-point system is used to measure the scale of financial exchange (varies between 1-4 from "none" to "regularly") and 8-point system is used to measure the frequency of the support and gift exchange (varies between 1-8 from "almost never" to "almost all the time"). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the construct validity. As a result of the analysis made, the value of KMO was determined as 0,719. The  $\chi^2$  value of the Bartlett test was 338,329 ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $sd = 22$ ). The

total variance explained was determined as 60,252%. Lastly, the scale is consistent with the original scale. The study conducted by Coimbra and Mendonca (11) points out that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.85 for the support given to parents. The reliability of the scale has also been measured as 0.623 in this study.

The affectual and functional solidarity items were summarised and the total was used to measure intergenerational solidarity. For data analysis, the two dimensions of affectual and functional solidarity were treated as one construct measuring intergenerational solidarity. Therefore, the reliability of these two scales was recalculated after all the items had been standardized, with Cronbach's alphas of .798.

Possible differences between two independent groups were analyzed on the basis of an independent sample test; possible differences between more than two independent groups were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance. The Pearson Correlation coefficient was used to determine the degree of causal relationship between two continuous variables. Functional interdependence and solidarity-between-generations multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of demographic variables on affectual solidarity.

#### **Ethical consideration**

Signed informed consent was obtained from all elderly. The ethics committee of university approved the study, which was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki. Scale was used after receiving permission from the authors.

#### **RESULTS**

Of the elderly parents surveyed, 47.7% were male and 52.3% were female, with 1.9% being single, 64.4% married and 33.8% widowed or divorced. While 25.5% worked full time and 0.5% worked part time, 47.7% were retired and 26.4% were not working. For geographical proximity, 16.2% lived with their children, 9.3% on the same street as their children, 13% in the same district within driving distance, 23.1% within the same city and 38.4% lived in different cities or countries (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of demographic characteristics.

Variable	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	103	47.7
Female	113	52.3
<b>Age group</b>		
60-65	75	34,7
66-71	57	26,4
72-77	34	15,7
78+	50	23,2
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	4	1.9
Married	139	64.4
Divorced/Widowed	73	33.8
<b>Work status</b>		
Full time	55	25.5
Part time	1	0.5
Retired	103	47.7
Non-working	57	26.4
<b>Number of children</b>		
1-2	61	28,2
3+	155	71,8
<b>Geographical proximity</b>		
Same house	35	16.2
Same street	20	9.3
Same neighbourhood with car	28	13.0
Same city with car	50	23.1
Different city/country	83	38.4
<b>Perceived health status</b>		
Bad	18	8,3
Middle	96	44,4
Good-Excellent	102	47,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100.0</b>



In this research founded that the average for affectual solidarity dimensions was 54.08, the average of functional solidarity dimensions was 12.26, the average of the intergenerational solidarity was 66.35 and the average of the SWLS was 21.62 (Table 2).

When the demographic factors affecting intergenerational solidarity are examined; while no statistically significant differences were found between elderly parents and their average gender, age, marital status, employment status, number of children, or perceived health status ( $p>0.05$ ) on the intergenerational solidarity scale, significant statistical differences were observed among elderly parents with respect to geographical proximity on the intergenerational solidarity scale ( $p<0.05$ ). The intergenerational solidarity average ( $74.11\pm 10.532$ ) of parents living with adult children was significantly higher than that of parents living on the same street ( $66.15\pm 9.750$ ), in the same neighbourhood (accessible by car) ( $64.39\pm 9.286$ ) or in different cities or countries ( $62.48\pm 9.059$ ). The intergenerational solidarity average of parents living in different cities or countries ( $62.48\pm 9.059$ ) was significantly lower than that of parents living in the same town (accessible by vehicle) ( $68.54\pm 8.848$ ). (Table 3)

In terms of demographic factors affectual solidarity; while no significant statistical differences were found between the affectual solidarity of elderly parents and gender, age, marital status, employment status, number of children, geographical proximity ( $p>0.05$ ), statistically significant differences were observed between the average perceived health status of elderly parents and affectual solidarity ( $p<0.05$ ), with the affectual solidarity average of elderly parents with good-excellent health ( $55.21\pm 7.403$ ) being significantly higher than that of those with bad health ( $50.72\pm 7.756$ ) (Table 3).

In this study while no differences were observed between the functional solidarity average of elderly parents and age, employment status, number of children and perceived health status ( $p>0.05$ ), a statistically significant difference was observed between functional solidarity and geographical proximity, gender, marital status ( $p<0.05$ ). In this study, the functional solidarity average of female parents ( $13.28\pm 5.171$ ) is significantly higher than male parents ( $11.15\pm 5.216$ ), single parents ( $13.29\pm 5.343$ ) is higher than married parents ( $11.70\pm 5.193$ ) and living in the same house or very close ( $19.37\pm 5.672$ ) is higher than other living condition (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Summary of all scales.

Variable	N	M	sd
Affectual Solidarity (10–60)	216	54.08	7.78
Functional Solidarity (5–32)	216	12.26	5.28
Intergenerational Solidarity (Standardised Scales) (15–92)	216	66.35	10.15
Satisfaction with Life (5–35)	216	21.62	6.57

When the relationship between intergenerational solidarity (affectual, functional and intergenerational solidarity-standardised scale) and life satisfaction is analyzed by Pearson's correlation, the SWLS was compared with affectual solidarity in moderating a positive linear relationship, results were  $r=0.401$ ,

$p<0.01$ . Between the SWLS and the intergenerational solidarity average, a positive linear relationship was found to be insignificant ( $r=0.368$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, no significant relationship was observed between the SWLS and functional solidarity ( $r=0.117$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). (Table 4).

**Table 3.** Differences between intergenerational solidarity and affectual solidarity- functional solidarity and demographic variables.

	Intergenerational solidarity (Standardised scales)			Affectual solidarity			Functional solidarity		
	mean±sd	p	Different	mean±sd	p	Different	mean±sd	p	Different
<b>1.Gender</b>									
Male	65.35±10.709	0.169	-	54.20±7.838	0.835	-	11.15±5.216	<b>0.003</b> <b>**</b>	
Female	67.26± 9.579			53.98±7.774			13.28±5.171		
<b>2.Age group</b>									
60–65	67.91±10.260	0.393	-	54.66±7.565	0.837	-	13.25±5.700	0.193	-
66–71	65.38±10.761			53.42±8.413			11.96±5.351		
72–77	66.41±10.213			54.23±6.919			12.17±5.078		
78 +	65.13±9.219			53.90±8.080			11.23±4.593		
<b>3.Marital status</b>									
Single	67.36±10.665	0.279	-	54.08±8.085	0.989	-	13.29±5.343	<b>0.035*</b>	
Married	65.80± 9.857			54.09±7.648			11.70±5.193		
<b>4.Work status</b>									
Full time	64.78±10.829	0.439	-	53.25±7.972	0.652	-	11.52±4.932	0.402	-
Retired	66.87±10.252			54.16± 7.894			12.70±5.652		
Not working	66.70± 9.221			54.58± 7.440			12.12±4.957		
<b>5.Number of children</b>									
1–2	66.73 ±11.578	0.730	-	53.39 ±8.252	0.412	-	13.34 ±5.935	0.061	-
3 +	66.20 ±9.574			54.36 ±7.607			11.84 ±4.968		
<b>6. Geographical proximity</b>									
Same house	74.11± 10.532	<b>0.000**</b>	1-2.3.5 5-4	54.74± 7.841	0.338	-	19.37±5.672	<b>0.000</b> <b>**</b>	1-2.3.4.5 5-4
Same street	66.15± 9.750			54.150±7.527			12.00±4.679		
Same neighborhood with car	64.39± 9.286			53.214±7.345			11.17±3.507		
Same city with car	68.54± 8.848			55.82±8.011			12.72±3.769		
Different city/ country	62.48± 9.059			53.04±7.803			9.43±3.489		
<b>7. Perceived health status</b>									
Bad	62.33±10.742	0.086	-	50.72 ±8.756	<b>0.049*</b>	<b>1–3</b>	11.61±4.876	0.207	-
Middle	65.71±9.989			53.52 ±7.837			12.19±4.945		
Good/ Excellent	67.66±10.062			55.21 ±7.403			12.45±5.694		

\*:p<0.05 \*\*p < 0.01



**Table 4.** Analysis of the relationship between intergenerational solidarity and affectual solidarity-functional solidarity and life satisfaction (Pearson correlation) .

		Affectual solidarity	Functional solidarity	Intergenerational solidarity (Standardised scales)
Satisfaction with life	R	0.401	0.117	0.368
	P	<b>0.000**</b>	0.086	<b>0.000**</b>

\*:p<0.05 \*\*p < 0.01

## DISCUSSION

It was found that the average level of affectual solidarity of elderly parents was high and that the average of intergenerational solidarity and life satisfaction was moderate and that of functional solidarity was lower.

Bengtson (2) has stated that the older generation is more affectual solidarity than the younger generation. In the study conducted by Hazer, Ozturk and Gursoy (12) on adult children, they found that the averages of the affectual solidarity of the elderly ( $54.08 \pm 7.78$ ) were higher than the younger ones ( $49.30 \pm 7.23$ ).

Researches differs on the question of which side benefits more from the exchange relations (functional solidarity). Some studies highlight the benefit to the adult children (13), while others accentuate the contribution made to elder parents (14). When the results of the research on adult children by Hazer, Ozturk and Gursoy (12) are compared with the results of this study; adult children ( $14.42 \pm 5.58$ ) were found to have higher functional solidarity than older parents ( $12.26 \pm 5.28$ ).

Previous studies reported inconsistent associations between subjective well-being, life satisfaction and age. Larson (15), reported subjective well-being (life satisfaction) declines with advancing age; however, Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (16) found the levels of life satisfaction were similar across different age groups despite the decline in other resources such as income and becoming widowed. When the factors of health and demographic characteristics such as financial

resources, widowhood, and loss of friends were controlled, the associations between subjective well-being and age became not significant. When the findings obtained from this study were compared with those of Hazer, Ozturk and Gursoy's study (12) on adult children, the life satisfaction levels of adult children ( $22.56 \pm 6.56$ ) were almost similar to the elderly adults ( $21.62 \pm 6.57$ ).

When the demographic factors affecting intergenerational solidarity are examined; significant statistical differences were observed among elderly parents with respect to geographical proximity on the intergenerational solidarity scale in this research.

Many studies have pointed to geographical distance as an important determinant of intergenerational support: living nearby increases the amount of mutual support provided (17). These studies introduced geographic proximity as an independent variable, or as an explanation of the level of intergenerational support. Geographic proximity can be considered a dimension of intergenerational solidarity in its own right as well. The proximity of family members can play a key role in this decision making process. For example, couples with young children may choose to live closer to their parents in order to take advantage of a potential source of low-cost childcare (18). Also in this research our analysis shows that geographical proximity is the determinant of intergenerational solidarity.

In this research, results show that the most important factor affectual solidarity is the perceived

health status. As the health status of the elderly parent improves, affectual solidarity increases. The impaired health is can lead to a decline in quality of life and good living conditions, so the level of affectual solidarity may be reduced. In addition; some sick and weak elderly adults need a lot of support. This may cause them to feel addicted and lose their autonomy or control. This gives the impression that it may lead to a decrease in affectual solidarity with each other.

In this study, the functional solidarity average of female parents is significantly higher than male parents, single parents is higher than married parents and living in the same house or very close is higher than other living condition. Other research results also support this situation.

It was found that mothers receive more help from their children than father and family status was found to be associated with intergenerational exchange patterns (19). Married parents tend to provide greater help to their children than widowed and divorced parents, while the latter tend to receive more help from their children (5).

Silverstein and Litwak (19) found that living in shared households or nearby places is the predecessor of functional solidarity. The studies suggest that proximity can be used as an adaptive strategy: e.g., working adult children in France receive more help with childcare because of their greater proximity to their mothers. Having a greater care need may have triggered this choice of residence. Similarly, single parents with no partner to rely on tend to live closer to their mothers, and therefore receive more help.

Research findings by Knijn ve Liefbroer (17) showed that single parents received more help, again because they tended to live closer to their mothers.

When the relationship between life satisfaction and intergenerational solidarity and two sub-dimensions is examined, it was founded that there was a positive relationship between SWLS scale and

affectual solidarity and intergenerational solidarity, but there was no significant relationship between SWLS scale and functional solidarity.

Mancini and Blieszner (6) suggested higher levels of affectual solidarity determine the intergenerational relationship quality and older adults' and adult children's life satisfaction. This finding is consistent with other studies, which suggested better relationship quality between older adults and adult children was associated with better life satisfaction in both generations. These results also support our research findings.

Although functional solidarity positively affects wellbeing, the role played by emerging adults seems to influence this process. The level of support provided by adult children, their value, the level of maturity and the quality of relationship with both parents, adult children's work status, the health status of the parents and the size of care networks are influential on life (3). However, research on intergenerational support (functional solidarity) has indicated that it does not necessarily enhance the psychological wellbeing and life satisfaction of the elder generation, and sometimes even reduces it. Negative effects of intergenerational solidarity are found in several studies. High family solidarity creates heavy demands on families of low economic status. An unbalanced resource exchange seems to reduce satisfaction with life, as well as filial maturity and satisfaction with the relationship. There was no correlation between life satisfaction and functional solidarity in this study (4).

In conclusion; scientific studies in this area have primarily identified the conditions required for older people to become more active in society, recommending that a balance should be sustained between welfare state practices and intergenerational solidarity networks to institutionalise intergenerational solidarity. Without such support, the entire burden of elder care may fall on the family. In line with that, time and amount of intergenerational communication decreased.



Unfortunately, decreasing intergenerational interaction increases conflicting values in the society. To protect and sustain our social values, it is important to increase the number of studies that strengthen intergenerational relations, facilitate transfers, and gather older individuals with younger individuals as well as young individuals with children.

This study has some limitations. First, it assumes the perspective of parents of adult children. Thus,

the research should be repeated with a broader sample and in areas of varying socioeconomic levels. Similarly, repeating the study with different cultures and comparing the findings will provide useful results.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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