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 RESEARCH

## THE EFFICACY OF REMINISCENCE THERAPY ON THE LIFE SATISFACTION OF TURKISH OLDER ADULTS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Integrative elder care services require parity between mental and medical health needs of elders. Therefore, up-to-date mental health interventions geared towards elderly need to be adopted in Turkey. This preliminary study investigated the efficacy of reminiscence therapy on life satisfaction of Turkish older adults.

**Materials and Method:** Participants (N = 70) were administered the Turkish version of Life Satisfaction Index A (LSIA). Using an experimental matched-pairs design, volunteering participants were screened for a reminiscence therapy group program. Pretest and posttest LSIA scores for the treatment and non-treatment control group were evaluated for significant differences. A focus group interview was also conducted to evaluate participants' group experience.

**Results:** Data from non-parametric tests revealed non-significant increases in the life satisfaction scores of treatment group participants. Participants reported positive feedback regarding the group experience, e.g. group's role in facilitating interaction and friendship among participants, enhancing a more positive self-image and leading to enjoyment and pleasant feelings.

**Conclusion:** No significant effect of reminiscence therapy on life satisfaction was found in this study which was carried out with a limited number of participants. However, it appears reminiscence therapy has potential benefits for elders in empowering them emotionally and helping them socialize.

**Key words:** Mental health, Reminiscence therapy, Life satisfaction, Elders.

 ARAŞTIRMA

## ANIMSAMA TERAPİSİNİN YAŞLILARDA YAŞAM DOYUMUNA ETKİSİ: BİR ÖN ÇALIŞMA

### Öz

**Giriş:** Bütünleşik yaşlı sağlığı hizmetleri hem ruhsal, hem de tıbbi ihtiyaçların dikkate alınmasını gerektirmektedir. Bu nedenle, ruh sağlığı alanında yaşlılara yönelik yeni müdahale yöntemlerinin ülkemizde tanınmasına ihtiyaç vardır. Bu ön çalışma, anımsama terapisinin yaşlılarda yaşam doyumu üzerindeki etkisini araştırmıştır.

**Yöntem ve Gereç:** Katılımcılara (N = 70) Yaşam Doyumu İndeksi A uygulanmıştır. Eşleştirilmiş grup deneysel deseni kullanılarak gönüllü katılımcılardan deney grubu ve kontrol grubu oluşturulmuştur. Deney grubu ve kontrol grubu öntest ve sontest yaşam doyumu puanlarına göre karşılaştırılmışlardır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların grup yaşantısına ilişkin değerlendirmeleri, deneysel grup üyelerinin katıldığı bir görüşmeodaklı grupta araştırılmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Yapılan analizlerde, MannWhitney U Test ve Wilcoxon Test sonuçları, deney grubundaki katılımcıların yaşam doyumu puanlarında istatistiksel açıdan anlamlı olmayan yükselmeler göstermiştir. Görüşme odaklı grup sonucunda elde edilen nitel veriler, grup yaşantısının kişilerarası ilişkilere ve arkadaşlığa ortam sağlayıcı rolüne, daha olumlu bir benlik algısına ve mutluluk verici duygulara yol açmasına ilişkin olumlu geri bildirimlere işaret etmiştir.

**Sonuç:** Kısıtlı sayıda katılımcı ile yürütülen bu çalışmada, anımsama terapisinin yaşlılarda yaşam doyumu üzerinde belirgin etkisi bulunamamıştır. Ancak, anımsama terapisinin yaşlıların duygusal açıdan daha olumlu hissetmelerine ve sosyalleşmelerine katkıda bulunmuş olduğu söylenebilir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Ruh sağlığı, Anımsama terapisi, Yaşam doyumu, Yaşlılar.

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of older adults is growing rapidly both in the developed and developing world. Although Turkey is a relatively younger nation with people 65 and over constituting 8 percent of the total population (1), this proportion is expected to increase almost to 12.9% over the next 25 years in Turkey (2). With increased life expectancy, maintaining life quality into later years of life will be crucial and so will older adults' mental health needs. Reminiscence therapy (RT) is becoming increasingly popular among gerontology professionals who are providing mental health services for older adults. Although reminiscence by elders has often been regarded as an escape from reality, or a mental dysfunction (3), it is also considered by others to be an effective intervention today in working with elders (4, 5). Several authors (6, 7, 3) suggest the use of RT in order to enhance various aspects of psychological wellbeing in elders, including life satisfaction (LS).

Reminiscence is the process or practice of thinking or telling about significant past experiences (8). RT involves the process of sharing memorable past experiences through verbal interaction at a group setting. Recalling past accomplishments and pleasant memories (6) can enhance a sense of empowerment, expand coping capabilities and help maintain a positive selfconcept for older adults (10, 3, 11). RT is grounded in the theories of Erikson (12) and Butler (13). According to Erikson (1968), human beings pass through developmental stages throughout their lifespan, and face developmental crisis in each stage. As for the later life crisis (ego integrity vs. despair, i.e. the eighth stage of psychosocial development), accepting one's life as a whole and reflecting on that life in a positive manner is the main task. Elders look back on their lives and they either develop a sense of ego integrity and satisfaction, or a feeling of despair. Butler (13) extended Erikson's theory and proposed that elders can achieve an overall sense of satisfaction regarding their past and present lives by reminiscence.

Research regarding the effect of reminiscence on LS of elders is controversial, with some citing positive outcomes (14, 15, 20, 16, 17), and some others reporting no effects or positive correlations (18, 19, 20, 21). By investigating the effect of a RTP, this study is expected to elicit valuable data regarding the use of reminiscence in counseling older adults. It is also unique in that there has never been an empirical research investigating the effect of RT on the LS of Turkish older adults.

The purpose of the present paper is to report results from a preliminary study that investigated the efficacy of a reminis-

cence therapy program (RTP) on the LS of Turkish elders. A brief summary of quantitative results from the nonparametric tests are provided. Qualitative data from the focus group interview conducted with the treatment group is also presented. Results of the study and implications for research and practice are discussed.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

### Sampling

In the first phase of the study, a convenience sample of Turkish elders (N = 70, 39 women and 31 men, M = 77 years old) living at 75. Yıl Emekli Sandığı Retirement Home in Ankara were administered the Turkish version of Life Satisfaction Index A (LSIA) and a demographic data sheet. In the second phase of the study, volunteering participants were recruited for the treatment group. Using an experimental matchedpairs design, each subject in the treatment group was paired with another exactly matching participant on the basis of their pretest LSIA scores in order to form the notreatment control group. Treatment group participants were five volunteering older adults (three women and two men) aged 62-78 (M = 68 years old). All participants in the treatment group were retired, and none of them had any limitations in terms of their physical and mental health as reported by the institution's psychologists and medical staff.

### Instrument

#### *Life Satisfaction Index A (LSIA)*

LSIA (22) was used in order to assess LS levels of participants. LSIA is a short, selfadministered, threepoint Likert scale that measures LS in older adults. The index has 20 items that help identify older individuals' own evaluations of their present or past lives, and their satisfaction or happiness with it. A higher score in LSIA represents greater satisfaction with life. Criterion related validity (.60-.99) and Cronbach's alpha reliability for internal consistency (.87) were established by Neugarten et al. (22). LSIA was adapted to Turkish culture by Karatas (23). The Cronbach's alpha reliability for internal consistency of the Turkish LSIA was .93. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for internal consistency in this study was .82.

#### *Demographic Data Sheet*

A demographic information sheet prepared by the researcher was used in order to identify the age, gender, marital status, number of children and educational background of the participants.



### Focus Group Interview

A semistructured focus group interview was conducted in order to evaluate the participants' group experience. A focus group interview is a timeefficient group interview where participants bring about their perceptions, experiences and thoughts about a given topic (24). Openended questions in the focus group interview focused on how members evaluated the overall group experience; what they liked best about the group, what they specifically learned in the group, what they gained personally from the experience, and how the group experience could have been differently. Three expert judges reviewed the primary interview guide for the focus group, and the interview guide was refined according to the reviewer comments. Excerpts from the focus group interview are cited in the results section in order to help establish the internal validity of the instrument.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection prior to the onset of the group program was conducted at a retirement home in Ankara, Turkey. Participants were administered the LSIA and a demographic data sheet. Elders who participated in data collection were informed about the intended RTP and volunteers were recruited for the RTP. An evaluative focus group interview was also conducted after completion of the treatment program. The focus group interview was taperecorded and it took about one and a half hours. Participants gave verbal informed consent regarding taperecording.

### Group Program Material

The program aimed at reminiscing about pleasant memories, past accomplishments, and joyful past experiences. Session themes included place of birth, recall of childhood pastimes, holidays, life accomplishments, and favorite places. Session themes were chosen due to their frequent use in previous research (25, 19, 4, 3, 27, 11). Photographic images relevant to the themes were used as memorymakers.

### Data Analysis

Nonparametric methods were employed in the analysis of data in this study. A MannWhitney U Test was employed in order to compare the treatment group and the control group in terms of their posttest LS scores. Also, a Wilcoxon Test was conducted to examine the difference between the pre and posttest LS scores of the participants in the treatment group. Data were analyzed using the SPSS for Windows 11.5 software. Criterion of statistical significance was established as  $\alpha = .05$  for all the statistical procedures performed.

Content analyses were performed on the recorded focus group interview by the researcher. The analyses were transcriptbased (24), and a coding scheme based on the emerging recurrent themes was created. Direct quotes from the interviews are provided in the results section.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analysis

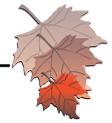
In the first phase of this study, the Turkish version of LSIA and a demographic information sheet were administered to a sample of 70 older adults (39 women and 31 men,  $M = 77$  years old). The LSIA scores of the participants ranged from 1 to 20 with a mean of 12.43 and a standard deviation of 4.33. Descriptive analysis showed no significant mean differences ( $t = .70$ ;  $p = .77$ ) between the mean LS scores of men ( $M_M = 12.84$ ) and women ( $M_W = 12.11$ ) who participated in the study. Also, no significant relationships were found between LS, and the demographic variables of age, educational background, marital status, and number of children. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the experimental and control group participants are presented in Table 1.

### The Effect of RTP on the LS of Older Adults

A MannWhitney U Test was conducted to examine the difference between the posttest LS scores of older adults who received RT and who received no treatments. Table 2 presents

**Table 1**— Demographic characteristics of experimental and control groups

Group	Mean Age	Gender	Educational Background	Marital Status	Number of children
Experimental	68	Male (n=2)	High school (n=2)	Divorced (n=4)	None (n=3)
		Female (n=3)	University (n=2)	Widowed (n=1)	Two (n=1)
			Graduate school (n=1)		Three (n=1)
Control	73	Male (n=2)	Primary school (n=1)	Never-married (n=2)	None (n=2)
		Female (n=3)	High school (n=2)	Divorced (n=1)	One (n=1)
			University (n=1)	Married (n=1)	Four or more (n=2)
			Graduate school (1)	Widowed (n=1)	



**Table 2**— The mean ranks of the experimental and control group participants on the LSIA

Group	N	Mean Ranks	P
Experimental	5	6.30	
Control	5	4.70	.40
Total	10		

the mean ranks of the experimental and control group participants on LSIA.

As Table 2 shows, the results of the MannWhitney U Test performed were nonsignificant,  $z = .84$ ,  $p = .40$ . There was not a statistically significant difference between the posttest LS scores of older adults who received RT and those individuals in the control group who received no treatments.

Additionally, a Wilcoxon Test was employed in order to examine the difference between the pre and posttest LS scores of older adults who received RT. Table 3 presents the mean ranks of the pre and posttest scores of treatment group participants on LSIA.

As shown in Table 3, the results of the Wilcoxon Test performed were not significant,  $z = 1.47$ ,  $p = .14$ . There was no significant difference between the pre and posttest LS scores of older adults who received RT. Nonsignificant increases were observed in the posttest LS scores of older adults who received RT, however, the treatment program was not effective in significantly increasing the LS scores of older adults in the treatment group.

### Results From the Content Analysis of the Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was conducted with the treatment group participants in order to evaluate the participants' experiences in the group program. The interview questions focused on how the members evaluated the overall group experience; what they liked best about the group, what they learned in the group, what they gained from the group experience, and how the group could have been differently.

**Table 3**— The mean ranks of the pre- and post-test scores of the treatment group participants on the LSIA

Ranks	N	Mean Ranks	p
Negative ranks	1	1.00	
Positive ranks	3	3.00	.14
Ties	1		
Total	5		

Members evaluated the overall group experience: content analysis of the interview revealed that the members' evaluation of the overall group experience was quite positive. Most of them reported that the interaction and sharing in the group made them feel closer to each other and more intimate than before they were. The excerpts below illustrate how the treatment group members perceived the overall group experience positively:

"It was very nice; it contributed to us in many ways. We got closer to each other. Before, we would just say "Hello" to each other, but now we've come a long way since then. I am very glad about the fact that we could get to know each other better, talk genuinely and honestly to one another here" [Member #5].

"I am very pleased about the group experience we had. We really got closer. At first, there was a distance in between, but then we got used to each other and a warm atmosphere was created. The group gathering became a special event for me through these weeks" [Member #1].

What the group members liked best about the group experience was having talked about the happiest times of their lives, such as childhood, and life accomplishments:

"Growing up in an extremely strict, authoritarian family, I perceived myself as a failure much of the time. But, when you asked about our life accomplishments... for the first time, I gave some thought to it. Thinking about the things I did, I realized I did a whole lot of things, and came to consider myself successful" [Member #2].

We talked about different stages of life... For me the best times of my life were those with the most fun, my childhood that is. Those were very innocent times that we did things without any hidden agendas, and I just love those times. As I say it, "I'm still wearing short pants at heart". [Member #3]

Members also agreed with each other that they liked the group because it was carried out in a goalfocused, structured fashion and it was purposeful, unlike their daily conversations. Members were also asked about what they specifically learned in the group. The altruistic behavior that groups facilitate was important for some group members. Members reported how the experience taught them about the power of groups in helping each other:

"We generally tend to resolve our problems by ourselves, and keep our joys to ourselves, as well. But, with this group, I learned that we could help each other in a group environment like this one" [Member #5].

"Even though we are old, we can still help others. I learned that in this group" [Member #4].

Another member reported that the chance to review past life experiences and hear each other's stories gave them a new perspective:



“Talking about our past lives, we saw that each one of us has a story of his or her own in life. I think that gave us a new perspective on life” [Member #3].

When asked what the members gained from the group, members reported that they realized their need for counseling groups like this one. Members agreed that the group served as a psychological support to them, which they said was a significant need of theirs:

“... in away, the group served as a psychological support to us. Talking to a counselor, and talking in a professional-led group makes a difference... you guys have a different approach than other people. It was a support for us even for a short time” [Member #5].

“I would agree on that, too. Because, we disclosed ourselves here, and came to trust each other in the group. As time went by, we started to talk more comfortably and supported each other” [Member #2].

Two members said they became more selfdisclosing individuals as a result of the rapport established in the group:

“I generally don't open up much and content with a few words when I have to talk. You guys opened me up here at this group” [Member #2].

“I am rather a reserved guy... the ambiance was so good here, I shared memories I never thought I could tell anyone... I opened up, and I am very happy about it” [Member #4].

Two members said their selfperception changed into a more positive one, saying they had the chance to reevaluate their life accomplishments which they had underestimated earlier:

“When my friends mentioned what type of things they perceived as ‘success’, I also turned to myself and reevaluated the things I perhaps underestimated before... I thought they were not worth mentioning, but then I came to regard them as success, too” [Member #5].

“I am now in more peace with myself. My perception about myself is more positive now, having realized I accomplished many things despite the limits my parents put on me” [Member #2].

One member emphasized that, in the group, he realized each person is uniquely worthwhile, which the rest of the members also agreed:

“We lived all those years and came at this point in life. So far, we definitely had our childhoods, studied and worked. In doing those, we did them without considering their value. Some of us felt successful, and some of us felt like having done nothing noteworthy. But, when we talked about them here one by one, we realized all these experiences were in deed worthwhile, and that each one of us is worthwhile. Being as-

ked about these and telling them, we felt worthwhile” [Member #3].

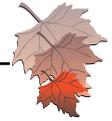
Group members were also asked how the group could be improved. They mostly agreed that the lifespan of the group could be longer, so that more themes could be discussed.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the efficacy of a RTP on the LS of Turkish older adults. Results revealed no statistically significant effect of RTP on increasing the LS scores of older adults in the treatment group. The findings of the present study are in line with previous experimental research (18,19,14,20,28,31) which reported non-significant increases in the LS scores of older adults who received RT. On the other hand, the findings of the present study are not consistent with previous experimental studies (15, 7, 16, 32 which indicate the effectiveness of RT in significantly increasing the LS scores of older adults. Nonsignificant results found in this study could be attributed to the limited duration of the group. One could also speculate that group counseling per se may not be sufficient to reframe all life experiences in some cases and individual counseling might as well be necessary to resolve some personal issues.

Qualitative results in this study revealed positive feedback from the members regarding their group experience. Previous research also pointed out the role of RT in enhancing interpersonal contact and the formation of new friendships (6); facilitating socialization, interaction, selfdisclosure, and rapport among participants (21). Likewise, the group experience in the present study seemed to have facilitated closer interpersonal relations among the group members and helped them make friends with each other. With the rapport established in the group, members disclosed themselves more and interacted with each other openly on a personal level. Previous research emphasized the influence of RT in empowering older adults and helping them reconstruct a more positive self concept (14, 10, 11) and selfesteem (30). In another Turkish study, İslam (32) conducted individual life review therapy with Turkish elderly clients and found significant increases in the selfacceptance levels of participants. Similarly, older adults who participated in the RTP in this study reported experiencing a more positive selfimage as they had a chance to review and reconsider what they regarded as ‘success’. By sharing them with the other group members, participants gained insight into their life accomplishments and felt more worthwhile as an individual.

Some members reported their specific needs for counseling interventions like this group program, and indicated that the group had been a psychological support for them. To da-



te, the safe environment and rapport provided in counseling groups facilitate intimacy, comfort and warmth for elders (33). Moreover, the group's inherent tendency to facilitate altruistic behavior helped members feel of use as they helped and supported each other. In a nutshell, the recall and sharing of pleasant memories in a group setting was a support, ego boost, and a pleasant personal experience for the participants.

### Limitations of the Study

The small sample size was a significant limitation of the present research. Reasons for low participation might be attributed to a) elders' lack of experience with such counseling groups, b) stigma of mental health, and/ or c) elders' not being researchwise. The small sample size limited the generalizability of the research findings. Therefore, the results are specific to the sample of elders who participated in the program.

*In conclusion*, mental health needs of the growing Turkish elderly population will be significant in the near future. Various mental health interventions can help older adults maintain their overall wellbeing in later life. However, the stigma of mental health is a major barrier for many older adults to utilize these services (29). Preventive mental health services that elders are more receptive to, such as RT, may help overcome the stigma of mental health services.

Several recommendations could be given to future researchers investigating the efficacy of RT on LS of elders. First, RT groups can be enriched by increasing session numbers and themes. The efficacy of RT with different samples of elders can be tested (e.g. communityliving elders). Also, a placeboattention control group, such as a current events discussion group can help draw comparisons between the efficacy of RT and other interventions.

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