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## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY: RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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The article analyses approaches to the definition of psychological well-being of an individual and its peculiarities in old age. The relevance of the problem is due to the growing interest in the positive side of human functioning and the wide spread of terms that reveal the psychological aspects of human well-being. Within the framework of the empirical study the features of manifestation of subjective psychological well-being in old age are studied. The results of the study of psychological well-being in three age periods in old age are presented, gender peculiarities are considered, and the results are described in terms of the level of education and family status of respondents.

**Keywords:** *personality, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, old age.*

### BUNĂSTAREA PSIHOLÓGICĂ A PERSOANELOR ÎN VÂRSTĂ: REZULTATELE UNUI STUDIU EMPIRIC

Articolul analizează abordările privind definirea bunăstării psihologice a individului și particularitățile acesteia la bătrânețe. Relevanța problemei se datorează interesului tot mai mare față de latura pozitivă a funcționării umane și răspândirii pe scară largă a termenilor care relevă aspectele psihologice ale bunăstării umane. În cadrul studiului empiric sunt studiate trăsăturile de manifestare a bunăstării psihologice subiective la bătrânețe. Sunt prezentate rezultatele studiului bunăstării psihologice în trei perioade de vârstă la bătrânețe, sunt luate în considerare particularitățile de gen, iar rezultatele sunt descrise în funcție de nivelul de educație și statutul familial al respondenților.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *personalitate, bunăstare psihologică, bunăstare subiectivă, bătrânețe.*

#### Introduction

Psychology is increasingly developing concepts that characterise the human being in terms of his or her integrity and functionality. Based on the philosophical heritage, as well as on medical models, scientists offer concepts of personality maturity, psychological well-being, mental health, and happiness. Due to the multifaceted nature of the content of these concepts, researchers in search of their main content characteristics focus on different aspects and features of their manifestation in different age groups.

At the present stage, the large-scale ageing of the world population causes the need to revise the concepts, including psychological ones, characterising old age and old age in general. According to forecasts, between 2015 and 2050, the share of people over 60 in the world population is expected to almost double from 12% to 22%. In addition, every year we are witnessing an increase in life expectancy as a result of economic development and scientific progress. At the same time, the opportunities for older people in many spheres of activity are also increasing, which affects the psychological component of a person. It is also worth noting that for a long time old age and old age both in society and in scientific literature were interpreted mainly from the position of deficit (deterioration of general health, the emergence of diseases, cognitive dysfunction, etc.). However, today, due to the general trend of ageing of the world's population, there is a need to study the factors affecting the quality of life of an elderly person, providing him/her not only physically comfortable, but also psychologically comfortable old age.

Today, more and more specialists raise questions about active old age, and WHO in the world report on ageing in 2002 and 2015 [23, 24] defines the term healthy ageing as a process of developing and maintaining functional capacity that ensures well-being in old age. Thus, research on the psychological well-being of older people becomes an actual and important problem of psychology.

### **The theoretical framework**

The term „psychological well-being” (psychological well being) is widely recognised in modern psychology. At present, there are several concepts, the authors of which aim to reveal and describe the phenomenon of psychological well-being. In the psychoanalytic tradition, psychological well-being was achieved through the satisfaction of the individual’s needs through sublimation. S. Freud [13] identified psychological health with the absence of neuroses. C. Jung [16], in turn, introduced the concept of individuation, speaking about the formation of integrity and individuality of personality. A. Adler [18] recognised a person as healthy and prosperous if he/she is able to establish and maintain social relationships. In the works of K. Horney [14] psychological well-being is determined by the absence of expressed defence mechanisms in the personality.

Proponents of the humanistic approach considered psychological well-being in the context of development and personal growth. Thus, A. Maslow [8, 9] introduced the concept of self-actualisation leading to the achievement of identity. C. Rogers [10] defined a psychologically healthy person through congruence, self-knowledge and realisation of the need for actualisation, calling such people fully functioning. E. Deci & R. Ryan [20], developing the theory of self-determination, introduced three needs, the degree of realisation of which determines the well-being of an individual: autonomy, competence and sense of community.

The systematic study of the problem of psychological well-being, started by N. Bradburn [19] back in the 1960s, still remains a relevant subject of research due to the fact that the list of factors affecting psychological well-being is constantly expanding and acquiring a complex character. N. Bradburn believed that psychological well-being is comparable to life satisfaction. He considered psychological well-being as a ratio (balance) of two types of affect - positive and negative. If positive affect dominates over negative affect, a person feels satisfied, i.e. has a high level of psychological well-being, in the opposite case a person feels unhappy and dissatisfied, i.e. has a low level of psychological well-being. The results obtained by N. Bradburn [19], as well as the data of other researchers, for example, C. Reynolds [21], M. Seligman [11] have shown that psychological well-being is determined primarily by a person’s experience and the degree of expression of negative and positive effects.

Modern researchers P. P. Fesenko [12], T. D. Shevelenkova [15] consider psychological well-being as a holistic experience expressed in the subjective feeling of happiness, satisfaction with oneself and one’s own life, as well as related to basic human values and needs.

Moldovan authors T. Turchină, C. Platon, Z. Bolea [5], in their works emphasise the importance of psychological well-being in assessing the quality of human life, pointing out that the experience of psychological well-being is the basis of an individual’s lifestyle and is realised in the feeling of happiness that a person feels when looking back at his/her life experience. A. Sîrbu, A. Potâng, T. Tulbure [3] also consider psychological well-being of a person in the context of the individual’s quality of life, emphasising its importance in the definition of this concept. S. Rusnac [2] points out the significance of psychological well-being in a person’s professional life, in her works she notes that people of retirement age, who continue to work, show a higher level of psychological well-being and labour satisfaction than their middle-aged colleagues. S. Tolstaia [4] in her studies of self-actualisation of housewives and working middle-aged women, points out that employment in professional activities has a positive effect on a woman’s sense of subjective well-being. N. Balode, I. Grecu-Stăvilă [1] in her study raises the issue of the relationship between psychological well-being and the awareness and demonstration of sexuality.

A significant contribution to the research on psychological well-being was made by C. Ryff [22]. Analysing the literature, she summarised and identified six main components of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental management, purpose in life, and personal growth.

A person with high autonomy is able to be independent, he is not afraid to oppose his opinion to the opinion of the majority, he can afford unconventional thinking and behaviour, he evaluates himself based on his own preferences. Lack of sufficient autonomy leads to conformism, excessive dependence on the opinion of others.

Environmental management implies the presence of qualities that determine the successful mastery of

various activities, the ability to achieve the desired, to overcome difficulties on the way to the realisation of their own goals, in case of lack of this characteristic there is a feeling of their own powerlessness, incompetence, there is an inability to change or improve something in order to achieve the desired.

Personal growth involves the desire to develop, learn and accept new things, as well as a sense of one's own progress. If personal growth is not possible for some reason, the consequence is a feeling of boredom, stagnation, lack of faith in one's ability to change, to learn new skills, and decreased interest in life.

Positive relations with others - in this case it means the ability to empathise, the ability to be open for communication, and the presence of skills that help to establish and maintain contacts with other people, in addition, this characteristic includes the desire to be flexible in interaction with others, the ability to come to a compromise. The absence of this quality indicates loneliness, inability to establish and maintain trusting relationships, unwillingness to seek compromise, isolation.

The presence of life goals generates a sense of meaningfulness of existence, the value of what was in the past, is happening in the present and will happen in the future. Lack of goals in life leads to a sense of meaninglessness, boredom, and ennui. Self-acceptance reflects a positive self-assessment of oneself and one's life as a whole, realising and accepting not only one's positive qualities but also one's shortcomings. The opposite of self-acceptance is the feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself, characterised by the rejection of certain qualities of one's personality, dissatisfaction with one's past [22, 15].

C. Ryff [22] notes that the highlighted components of psychological well-being correlate with various structural elements of theories, which in one way or another deal with the positive functioning of personality.

Thus, the study of psychological well-being in old age seems relevant to us.

The *purpose* of the work is to study the features of psychological well-being in old age.

As a *hypothesis* of the experiment we put forward the assumption that there are differences in the manifestation of the level of psychological well-being in older people depending on gender, age, level of education and family status.

### Sample and Methods

The study was conducted at Ela (Israeli Centre for Psychological Assistance in Life Crises) within the Psychological Assistance for Former Victims of National Socialism department and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare through the City Social Service, Senior Citizens Department, namely in clubs for the elderly and pensioners. The Israeli Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has a special service for elderly Israelis. There were 202 participants in the study of which 107 (53%) were women and 95 (47%) were men.

The age of the respondents ranged from 60 to 90 years, the average age of the sample was 73.1 years; the average age of the women was 73.6 years and the average age of the men was 71.9 years. To observe changes in the dynamics of the phenomena we studied, we divided the respondents into 3 age groups. In the first group of 60-69 years old, the total number of respondents was 68, including 38 women or 55.8% of the total number of respondents in this age group and 30 men or 44.2%. In the second group 70-79 years, the total number of respondents was 68 out of which 32 females or 47 per cent of the total number of respondents in this age group and 36 males or 53 per cent. In the third age group 80+ years the total number of respondents was 66 of which 37 females or 56% of the number of respondents in this age group and 29 males or 44%.

The marital status of the respondents varied: married/married - 115 persons or 57 per cent of the total number of respondents, with 47 married women or 23.3 per cent of the total number of respondents and 68 married men or 33.7 per cent; widower/widow - 61 persons or 30.2 per cent of the total number of respondents, with 44 women or 21.8 per cent of the total number of respondents and 17 men or 8.4 per cent; divorced/divorced - 26 persons or 12.8 per cent of the total number of respondents, with 11 men or 5.4 per cent and 15 women or 7.4 per cent of the total number of respondents.

The education of the respondents was as follows: higher education - 114 persons or 56.4 per cent of the total number of respondents, of which 76 women or 37.6 per cent of the total number and 38 men or 18.8 per cent; secondary education - 88 persons or 43.6 per cent of the total number of respondents, of which 31 women or 15.3 per cent of the total number and 57 men or 28.3 per cent.

As a research method we used the C. Ryff *Psychological Well-Being Scale* adapted by N. N. Lepeshinsky [7]. The questionnaire allows measuring the subjective and objective side of psychological well-being.

Within the framework of the eudemonistic approach, based on earlier studies by M. Yadov [17], C. Ryff developed a multidimensional model of psychological well-being. For C. Ryff, well-being implies the realisation of a wide range of psychological capabilities. According to C. Ryff's theory, PB consists of 6 components: positive relationships with others, autonomy, personal growth, goals in life, self-acceptance, and environmental management (competence).

The Psychological Well-Being Scales questionnaire, a theoretically based instrument that is designed to measure the expression of the main components of psychological well-being. Currently, the multidimensional model of C. Ryff is accepted by many researchers, and the methodology of measuring psychological well-being developed by her is actively used in the research practice of many countries. This methodology measures actual psychological well-being, as opposed to potential well-being, the concept of which is derived from the humanistic paradigm, but is not operationalised by any questionnaire at present.

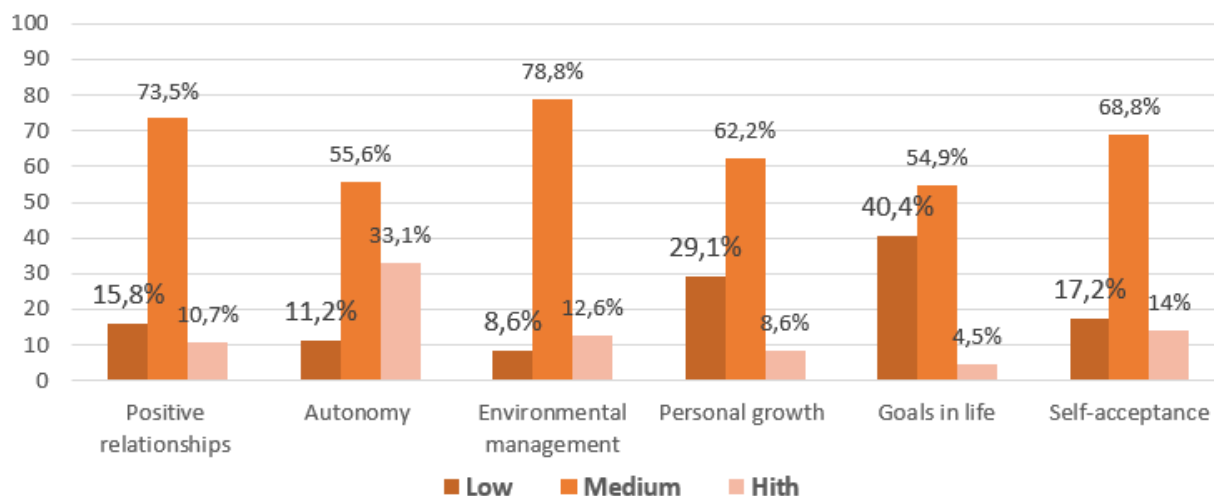
The obtained data were processed using statistical methods of research - descriptive statistics (determination of mean, standard deviation, percentages), as well as inductive statistics (determination of differences between groups of data using Student's T-criterion, determination of differences between groups using one-factor analysis of variance ANOVA). SPSS version 20.0 computer programmes and Microsoft Excel package were used for statistical data processing.

### Results of the study and discussion

According to the results of the calculation of the integral index, the psychological well-being of the elderly in our sample 71.5% of respondents are at an average level, 17.9% at a low level and 10.6% at a high level of psychological well-being. The obtained results indicate that the representatives of this age category have an average level of psychological well-being. More than 70% of respondents are at the average level of psychological well-being. The average level of well-being implies a positive attitude both to one's personality and a trusting, open attitude to the world, its orderliness and laws. Constructive attitude to problems, seeing them as opportunities rather than threats, is accompanied by aspiration to self-determination and priority of internal standards. A constructive attitude to one's own past and future is characteristic. The individual is involved in interpersonal relationships. Personal growth is felt and realised through the prism of close, trusting relations with others.

Let us consider the percentage ratio by levels of expression of psychological well-being scales in the total sample of respondents. The results are clearly presented in Figure 1.

**Fig. 1. Ratio of the expression of psychological well-being scales in the total sample in %.**



Analysing the presented histogram it can be noted that in old age the average level of well-being on all scales prevails. However, it can be noted that 40.4% of respondents have a low level on the Goals in Life



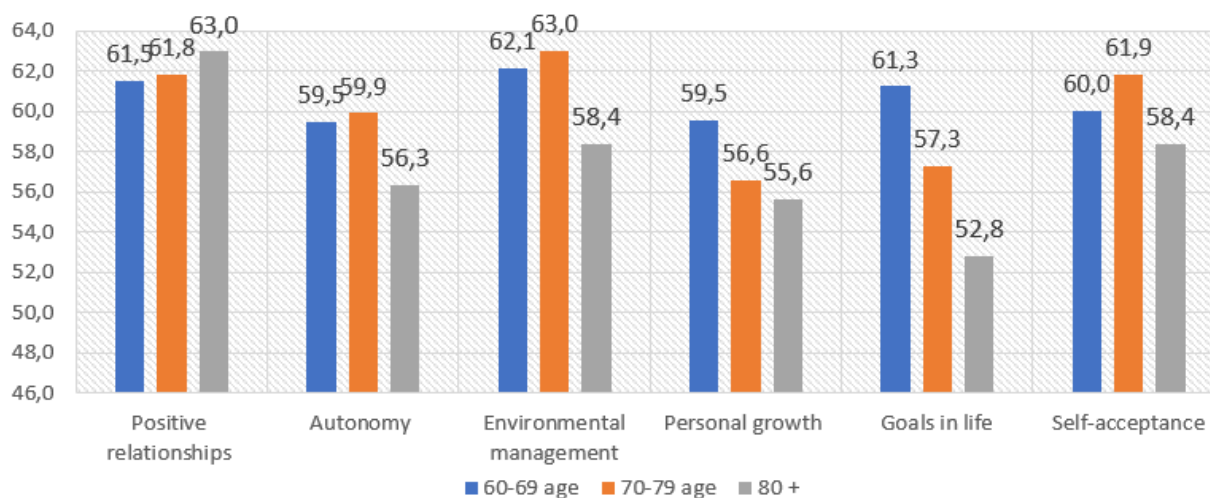
scale, which indicates that older people experience a sense of meaninglessness of their lives, do not see the prospects of their lives in the future and try not to plan their future. At the same time, only 4.5 per cent of older people who participated in the study have a sense of meaningfulness of existence, the value of what was in the past, is happening in the present and will happen in the future. Also, almost a third of respondents (29.1%) demonstrate a low level on the Personal Growth scale, believing that personal growth is impossible for them for some reason. This in turn can lead to a feeling of boredom, stagnation, lack of faith in their abilities to change, master new skills, and decreased interest in life. And only 8.6 per cent of older people show a desire to develop, learn and perceive new things, and feel their own progress.

However, according to the results of our study, one third of the sample (33.1%) retain high autonomy, i.e. they are able to be independent, are not afraid to oppose their opinion to the opinion of the majority, can afford unconventional thinking and behaviour, and evaluate themselves based on their own preferences. At the same time, 11.2% demonstrate a lack of sufficient autonomy, which leads to conformism, excessive dependence on the opinion of others.

The comparative analysis of the peculiarities of psychological well-being in elderly people depending on biological and social factors has shown the following.

Let us turn to the results of the analysis of this phenomenon depending on the age group of respondents: 60-69 years, 70-79 years and 80+. Figure 2. shows the correlation of average indicators on the scales of the Psychological well-being questionnaire in respondents in the three age groups.

**Fig. 2. Average scores on psychological well-being scales in three age subgroups in %.**



It can be noted that a significant decrease with age occurs on the scale „Goals in life”, in the age group 80 and older the indicators on this scale are significantly lower than in the first two groups, with a gradual decrease in goals with age. Also significant results are noted on the scale „Management of the environment”, but it can be seen that the decrease in indicators is not evenly, but on the contrary, by the age of 80, older people sharply begin to feel that they are losing control over their environment. This may be due to the cessation of professional activity, deterioration of health and the inability to do without help due to these changes. It should be noted that positive attitudes are characterised by a high level in all age subgroups. It should also be noted that with age there is also a decrease in the level of self-acceptance, which is also associated with the fact that it is difficult for a person to accept the fact of his/her own ageing and the associated fact of limitation of the usual way of life.

Analysing the data obtained as a result of the calculation in Table 2.13, it can be noted that statistically significant differences in psychological well-being among older people of different age subgroups (the first subgroup of 60-69 years, the second subgroup of 70-79 years and the third subgroup of 80+) are observed on the scale „Environment management” (at  $p=0.016$ ), „Goals in life” (at  $p=0.000$ ), as well as on the general level (integral indicator) of psychological well-being (at  $p=0.031$ ). Thus, older adults in the older age subgroup are less likely to manage the environment than older adults in other age subgroups.

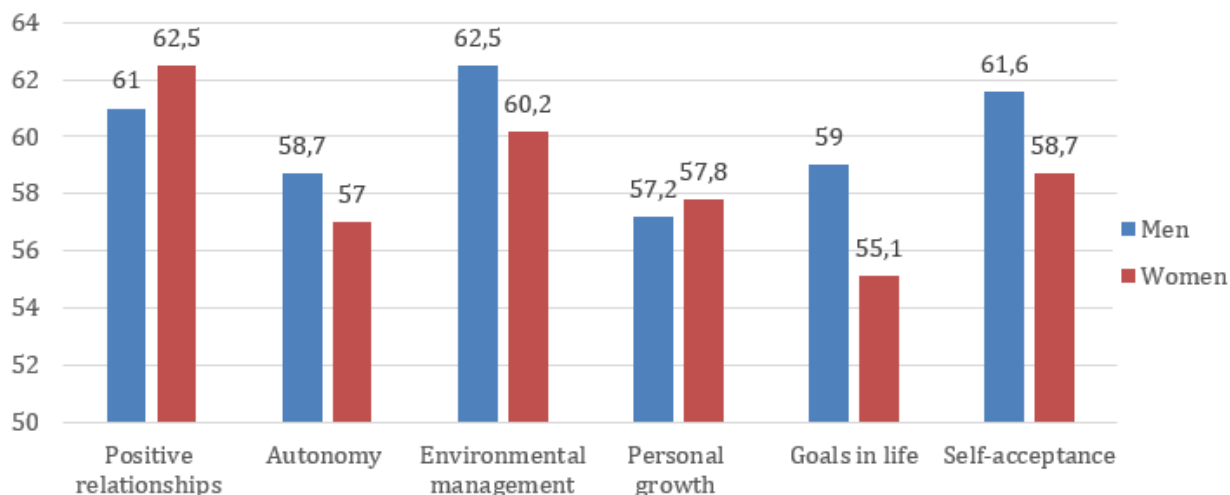
In addition, this age subgroup shows a sharp decrease in life goals and a lower overall level of psychological well-being. In older age groups, the integral index of psychological well-being is shifted to the left, approaching a low level; on the contrary, in the representatives of the first group (60-69), the integral index moves to the right edge, i.e. to higher values of the parameter.

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Let us analyse the data obtained as a result of diagnostics of psychological well-being in men and women. The results of the integrative indicator of psychological well-being allow us to conclude that the level of psychological well-being in men and women does not differ, while the factors contributing to well-being in men and women may differ.

Analysing the average indicators for the integral indicator of psychological well-being (figure 3), we can note that women have a slightly lower overall level than men, however, these differences are not significant, we can only point to a general trend. At the same time, it is important to note that women have a greater spread of data, i.e. greater variability in answers. Thus, in our sample there are women with high and low levels of psychological well-being, while in the group of men the indicators are concentrated in the area of the average level.

**Fig. 3. Mean values of psychological well-being scales in men and women in %.**

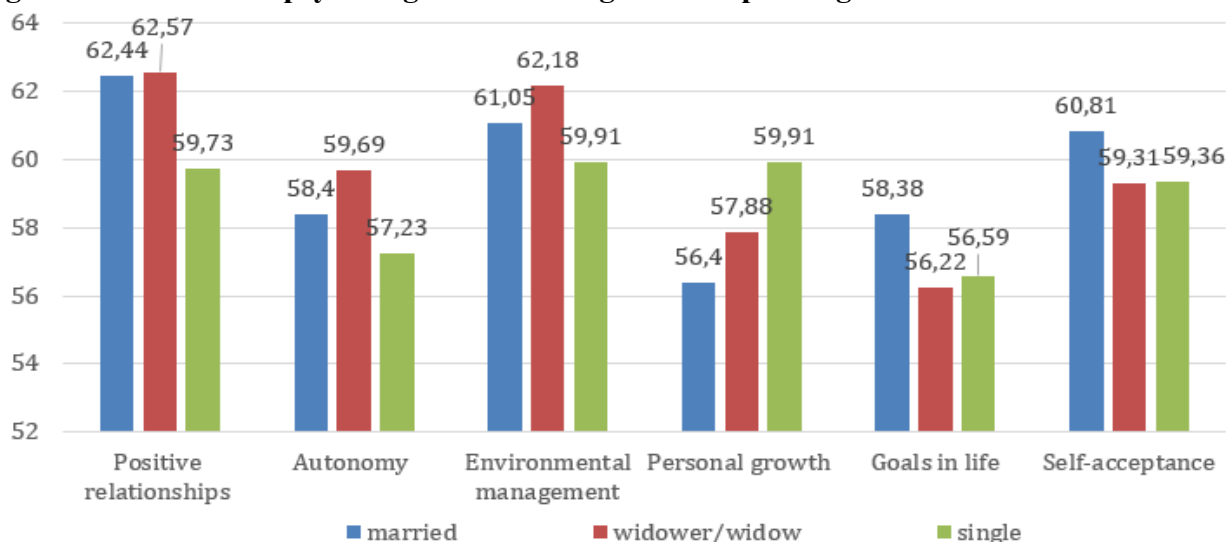


Analysing the mean scores on the scales of the psychological well-being questionnaire, it can be noted that older women tend to have a higher tendency to establish positive relationships than older men. However, older men tend to show a higher level of Autonomy, Environmental Management and Self-Acceptance compared to older women. However, according to the results of statistical processing of the data, the obtained results indicate that there are significant differences between men and women only on the scale „Goals in life” ( $t=2.369$  at  $p=0.034$ ): men have a higher index on this scale in contrast to women. Perhaps, women associate their goals in life to a greater extent with children and their life or work. They are characterised by high involvement in children’s life, feel their demand, which contributes to a harmonious life. They feel a positive emotional attitude and are generally satisfied with the quality of their life. No significant differences were found on the other scales of the questionnaire.

At the next stage, we proceeded to test the assumption that marital status has an impact on the psychological well-being of the individual in old age.

The data are presented in Figure 4.

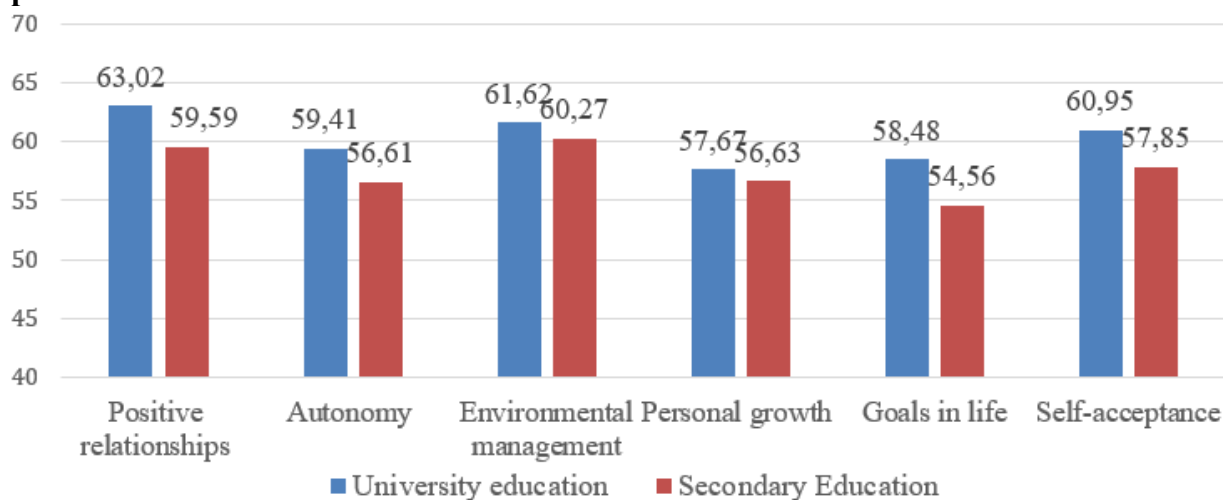
**Fig. 4. Mean values of psychological well-being scales depending on the marital status in %.**



According to the results of applying the non-parametric Student’s difference criterion, the significance of differences between the groups of elderly people living alone, living in a complete family and living with spouses in terms of the general level of psychological well-being, as well as its components, is not confirmed. In general, we failed to find a connection between marital status, the presence of close family relations and indicators of psychological well-being of the elderly person.

Further we analysed the results obtained by the Psychological Well-Being Scale methodology depending on the level of education. The average indicators are presented in Figure 5.

**Fig. 5. Mean values on the scales of psychological well-being depending on the level of education of respondents in %.**



The results presented in the histogram allow us to conclude that the level of psychological well-being among older people differs depending on their level of education. Thus, we can notice that respondents with University education have a differently higher level of psychological well-being on all scales than those with only secondary education.

Analysing the results of T-criterion calculation on psychological well-being of elderly people depending on their level of education we can note that elderly people with University education more often show posi-

tive attitude ( $t=2,021$  at  $p=0,045$ ), they have more pronounced goals in life ( $t=2,140$  at  $p=0,034$ ) and higher level of psychological well-being ( $t=2,210$  at  $p=0,029$ ) in contrast to elderly people with Secondary education. Thus, older people with University education are more competent in managing their own lives, are able to formulate goals and find the meaning of life in different manifestations. They are characterised by high meaningfulness of behaviour, planning of actions and forecasting of their consequences. They feel positive emotional mood and are generally satisfied with the quality of their life. So, we can say that the level of education is indeed a significant criterion in the formation of psychological well-being of a person in old age.

We realise that the data obtained by our statistical analysis are approximate and should be tested on a larger sample of subjects. Further study of this issue is necessary, taking into account the expansion of the empirical research object and methodological apparatus.

### Conclusion

The controlling experiment was aimed at investigating the peculiarities of psychological well-being of elderly people taking into account their age, family status and gender. The obtained results of the study allow us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The average level of psychological well-being prevails in the elderly, expressed in a positive attitude both to one's personality and a trusting, open attitude to the world, its orderliness and laws. However, elderly people of the older age subgroup (80+) are less inclined to manage the environment, experience a sense of meaninglessness of their lives, do not see the prospects of their lives in the future and try not to plan their future.

2. The level of psychological well-being does not differ between men and women, while the factors contributing to well-being may differ between men and women, with women showing a greater tendency to establish positive relationships and older men showing a tendency for higher levels of autonomy, environmental management and self-acceptance.

3. The significance of marital status and the presence of close family relationships in shaping the psychological well-being of the elderly has not been proven.

4. Older people with higher education more often show a positive attitude to life, they have more pronounced goals in life and a higher level of psychological well-being in contrast to older people with an average level of education.

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