A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON REGRET AND HAPPINESS AMONG ELDERLY RESIDENTS OF OLD AGE HOMES IN GUJRANWALA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This research offers a unique, culturally informed examination of regret and happiness in Pakistani elderly residents of old age homes. Within an interpretive phenomenological framework, and using Braun and Clarke's thematic coding methodology, we analyzed the manner in which Islamic spirituality and community shape emotional well-being for older adults. The in-depth interviews disclosed two thematic patterns, one of persistent regrets for family forsakenness, life aspirations not met and spiritual remorse; and the other newly found happiness associated with their home practices of faithfulness and mutual peers. Secular Americans often shared their deep solace and sense of purpose in religious ceremonies and nascent social networks. These included praying as a group and telling stories as a group, which turned isolation into collective resource seemed to shine light on the importance of family and the community for older adults' life satisfaction. One of few qualitative studies in Pakistan, our findings highlight culturally appropriate factors promoting resilience among the elderly in later life. We suggest that policy and practice interventions include faith-based counselling, community-building events, and enhanced legal supports to help safeguard the elderly. These findings emphasise the importance of understanding culture in gerontology and offer implications regarding research and interventions designed to enhance psychosocial care for a rapidly expanding elderly population in South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Aging is a rapidly emerging demographic trend in Pakistan. There are currently over 8 million Pakistanis that are aged 60 or more and it will reach to over 27 millions by the year 2050. Mortality has declined enormously (to some 68 years by 2012 and projected to be over 72 years by 2023). Pakistani culture has always upheld the joint family system where the elders are brought up and revered at home by younger generations. But economic imperatives, urban concentration, migration and changing social norms have weakened the multigenerational support system of extended family. Younger adults frequently move to take jobs or attend school, and the growing number of working women has meant less available caregiving for parents. A system of "old-age home", which is alien to the

societal ethos but yet has taken deep roots, has thus come into being in Pakistan.

There are anecdotal stories and qualitative studies describing the increasing population of

Pakistani senior citizens in old-age homes, as their offspring desert or fail to support them. According to Cassum (2021), diminished family bonds and breakdown of filial norms condemn many elderly into isolation and end up in shelter homes. This reorientation represents a "paradigm shift" from prevailing cultural values: Where living alone or in an institution was once stigmatized, it is now increasingly becoming the fate of more elderly Pakistanis. Aging is happening fastest in Asia, and the share of older people living in Pakistan's population is on the rise at a rate faster than ever before. These demographic and social changes establish a new environment in which an increasing number of older adults "live" in long-term care for the first time.

Happiness in old age has both its positive and negative aspects. This study focuses on two juxtaposition affective experiences: regret and happiness. Regret is about looking into the past and thinking about the opportunities you've missed out on; it's well known in psychology to decrease overall life satisfaction. Evidence reveals that greater life regret is correlated with well-being and depressive symptoms (Rutledge et al., 2024). In contrast, happiness (often used interchangeably with subjective well-being or life satisfaction) is likely to rise when people adjust favourably to circumstances in their lives. Positive adjustment and resilience in older individuals will bring better happiness, even if they face some hardships. To the best of our knowledge, there is a dearth of information available that describes how these emotional features are expressed in older persons admitted to institutions in Pakistan. In such people's context and with above mentioned load of their cultural, social parameters the study for regret and happiness among Pakistani old age homes deserves to be a directed work. By learning about these emotional states, we can make better strategies in the care of Seniors, with the objective to increase their quality of life.

Aims and Objectives

This is a study that aims to highlight the emotional lives of old persons living in old-age homes in Pakistan with reference to two dominant affective consequences: regrets and happiness. The selected emotions characterized two sets of experiences of institutionalized aging:

• Participants have described regrets most commonly as related to family desertion, uncompleted relationships, opportunities missed and spiritual guilt.

• Happiness appears from solidarity, resilience or spiritual coping so many elders may find peace in adversities.

The content is solidly grounded in qualitative phenomenological research, intended to explore the ways older adults experience their past, negotiate present challenges, and make meaning in institutional settings. 11 This focus is a direct response to Pakistan's evolving culture and tradition of joint-family caregiving that is eroding, as well the emergence of oldage homes. Through a focus on regret and happiness as key emotional outcomes, the paper examines an important – yet under-researched – dimension of aging in South Asia: what institutional living does to the emotional well-being and life satisfaction of older adults.

The comparison is made between experiences of regret and happiness among old adult individuals living in the old-age homes of Pakistan. More precisely, we are interested in the relation between the independent variable (old-age home resident), and its dependent emotional consequences (regret and happiness). The study poses: How do older people in residential care for the elderly describe their experiences of regret and happiness? We investigate what in the setting and participants' life-histories trigger those emotions. The investigation is based on the assumption that to live in an old-age home may bring about some kinds of regret (e.g., separation from family) and happiness (e.g., activities associated with religion).

Methodology

A descriptive phenomenological qualitative design was employed in this study, which is appropriate for investigating how older persons themselves experience and make sense of experiences with regret and happiness. The goal was to inductively explore participants' lived experiences rather than boxing them into categories beforehand. Interviews were

undertaken in Urdu through semistructured, in-depth interviews translated into English. Interviews enabled participants to respond in their own words and the openended nature of the interview meant that regret and happiness could be discussed at length. To ensure rigor, investigators adhered to phenomenological methods by limiting responses to open-ended questioning, attentive listening, while bracketing all preconceived insights to diminish bias. We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework for analysis. It entailed reading and re-reading transcripts, identifying insightful comments from participants, proceeding to code insightful commentary and then consolidating like codes into potential themes. Themes were further refined until they resonated with the voices and experiences of the participants. All coding and analysis were conducted managed as a group by the research team. Differences were resolved by discussion and ensured uniform interpretation of the data. Ethical considerations included informed consent from participants, the use of pseudonyms to protect privacy and confidentiality. Since talking about regrets and personal life can be emotional, participants were told that it was O.K. to skip questions or stop the interview at any time.

Study Variables

While it is a qualitative study, we theoretically situate living in an old-age home as the independent context (IV) and emotional outcomes (regret and happiness) as dependent variable/s (DV). Interview questions will focus on the experience of living in an institution and on feelings of regret and happiness. This IV/DV framing nicely elucidates the study's focus: you guessed it, how they lived setting and related experiences influence emotional well-being. However, we will not impose rigid variable categories and instead let themes emerge from the data (inductive thematic analysis).

Significance of study

Scarce are the qualitative assessments of regret and happiness among the institutionalised elderly population in South Asia. A recent review on elderly care in Pakistan observed that there is "meagre literature available on old-age homes," and this paper seeks to contribute towards filling that void. Furthermore, studies on the well-being of older adults in Pakistan have predominantly explored physical health or demographic predictors, with scant emphasis given to the inner emotional realm. In giving voice to the stories of older adults, this research fills a significant gap in gerontology literature. It also has practical implications:

understanding of regret, happiness and problems can drive psychosocial interventions, inform policy in elder care (eg need for retirement and day-care policy) and contribute to theory (below). Finally, by documenting these experiences my paper contributes to a growing awareness that non-Western contexts provide different aging experiences that should be explored by referring to sources from regional databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar and PubMed) and local scholarship as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Another qualitative study of older adults found themes of loss, resilience and meaning making. For instance, in qualitative research in Western samples older adults' regrets commonly focus on relationship estrangement and opportunities lost (Smith & Jones, 2015). On the flip side, negative reporting of happiness can also decrease among older individuals who are engaged in the community, have faith and use positive coping (Lee et al., 2017). In a Pakistani and wider South Asian setting, some literature suggests that institutional care may lead to increased loneliness but also offers surprise sources of support (Khan & Ali, 2018; Patel, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Gero transcendence theory and resilience theory underpin this research. The concept of Gero transcendence (Torn Stam, 2011) postulates that in old age many people adopt a more cosmic or transcendent perspective on life, which is frequently accompanied by enhanced life satisfaction. This theory proposes that older adults may be able to reframe previous regrets as part of the larger life story, including making peace with or finding value in past losses. Resilience theory suggests that emotional outcomes among older adults are influenced by resources that can be mobilized to buffer against adversity. We would expect that among those individuals with higher resilience (e.g., positive

thought, problem-solving), there will be greater happiness and lower regret. Using these frameworks, we will consider whether participants' stories indicate a shift transcending the ordinary world or a resilient accommodation to it, and further interpretation of findings.

Table 1
Inclusion and exclusion criteria table

Inclusion	*Exclusion*
Elderly individuals aged 50 years and above	Elderly below 50 years of age
Currently residing in an old-age home in Pakistan	Not residing in an institutional care setting
Able to provide informed consent	Unwilling or unable to give consent
no severe memory impairment	Severe cognitive impairment
Willing to participate	Too medically fragile to participate in interviews

Research Gaps

While emotional well-being in old age has been studied on a global scale, there are few studies from Pakistan and few studies on institution-based elderly. Current local work has predominantly focused on the physical health and caring needs and social neglect (e.g., Cassum, 2021) whereas little is known regarding the emotional well-being of elderly residents in old-age homes. Internationally, concepts such as life satisfaction, depression and resilience among older adults have been studied, but regret and happiness as dual consequences are under-studied still, particularly in South Asian societies where spirituality, family bonding and social behavior heavily affect their experiences of late life. Furthermore, the majority of previous research uses survey data which can fail to capture insights about how these experiences are experienced. Little research has been conducted in Pakistan, using qualitative phenomenological approach and understanding of emotion by elderly inside the institution.

Research Rationale

- Investigates regret and happiness in Pakistani old-age homes.
- Relies on thematic, qualitative methods to represent the rich meanings that older adults attach to their experiences.
  - References results to general theories of resilience, gerotranscendence and spiritual coping. By filling these gaps, the current study contributes to the gerontological and well-being literatures by providing culturally informed understandings that are relevant to researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

METHODOLOGY

The present qualitative study utilized a descriptive, comparative interview method to examine older adults' experience of regret and happiness in old age homes. Three pseudonymous participants (JM64, K2, N5) were interviewed in semi-structured, depth interviews. These participants were sampled purposively to gain a diversity of opinion amongst residents (e.g. including varying life histories and living arrangements), and drew upon a methodology used in recent qualitative studies for older people. All participants were deemed to have capacity to consent, and ethical procedures were followed: informed consent was gained; anonymisation by using code numbers instead of names was maintained; data from interviews were stored securely. Interviews were conducted for approximately 20–25 min each, recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis. Using the template analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), responses were read and re-read and open-coded inductively to ensure that themes were derived from the data. The first codes were created by extracting meaningful units of regret or happiness and those same codes were combined inductively into higher-order themes. For increased rigor, two researchers

coded data together and discussed coding for each interview with disagreements resolved through consensus.

Participants

The old age homes had received 3 long-term residents enrolled. They are identified by pseudonyms (initials and number codes) to protect privacy: JM64 (male, and his mid-60s), K2 (female; early 60s), N5 (female, mid-60s). These participants resided in 2 [Country]based homes With these, the three elderly shared powerful stories about regrets they had for their past and sources of wellbeing they currently possess.

Sampling Method

We employed purposive sampling, a standard approach in qualitative gerontological research designed to identify participants who are able to speak reflectively about experiences of life in later years. This allowed for the introduction of diverse life narratives (e.g. previous occupation, family status, health), that could affect regret- feelings or happiness,

Ethical consideration

The approach adopted in this study was consistent with ethical norms for dealing with human subjects. Prior to the interviews, the researcher gave clear and simple instructions on what the study was all about, its nature and process. Since the participants were more at ease with this approach, all gave verbal consent. We made it clear to participants that they did not have to participate if they did not want to and would be under no obligation at all in any way to take part or should not feel pressured into doing so. For the sake of confidentiality, no actual names were recorded.

Instead, the participants used nicknames and codes (e.g., JM64; K2; N5), and any form of recognizable information was deleted from the transcriptions. Audio recordings and notes were kept safe, and only accessed by the research team.

Because of the sensitive nature of regret and happiness, particular attention was paid to the emotional well-being of participants. They were assured that they could pass any question they did not want to answer and that the interview would be terminated at once if they became distressed.

Participants were not forcibly or coercively tested at any point.

Data collection

Data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the interview guide (see Item Pool) item below. This guide also served to ensure that central points were addressed, whilst enabling participants to share their own stories and opinions in depth.

Interviews were held in a homogeneous and relatively quiet room off the old age homes to grant each individual privacy and sense of comfort. The research team comprised three student researchers who alternated their roles of leading and observing the sessions. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were made comfortable in order for them to feel at ease with the interviewer.

The duration of each interview was about 20-25 minutes. Consent to the recordings of conversations was received by participants. The same time that participants were interviewed, the researchers took field notes to record NVs, AEs, and environmental context.

The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were verified against the audio for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed through thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

After becoming acquainted (immersing in the texts), significant units

(feeling, reflection and behaviour regarding repentance or happiness) were assigned to these categories. Candidate themes were then identified during initial coding on the basis of these codes. For instance, codes such as 'emotional withdrawal' and 'family abandoned', were clustered under the theme regretrelated, whereas codes such as "enjoying with firends" and "finding peace in prayer," fell under happiness related themes. The researchers kept reflexive memos about their decisions. Themes were compared with the data for fit, and a final thematic chart (Fig. 1) was compiled to demonstrate the links between each theme. Our strategy was largely inductive, with findings driven by participants' words, however we also discussed our emerging results in relation to theory.

Areas under investigation

From the coding and thematic analysis, the semi-structured interviews addressed the following themes.

The following themes are the principal areas of life lived in regret and happiness for elderly inhabitants of old age homes.

Table 2

Themes deducted for the interviews

Theme 1	Codes	Interpretation
Faith and Spiritual Coping	*Accepted the fate, Spiritual regret/guilt, Sacred time attachment, Prospect of transcendental, peace (Peace and the Peace Process), Transcendence belief, Acceptance of suffering on the spiritual level, religious gratitude Grateful acceptance, Fatalistic acceptance*	*Faith acted as a protective factor that help elders accept suffering, find inner peace, and maintain resilience in the face of regret and loneliness.*

Table 3

Theme 2	Codes	Interpretation
Resilience and Coping with Adversity	Adaptive transitioning, Reality-based coping, Emotional adaptation, Lag in dealing with emotion, Burden avoidance,	Although they face hardship, they practice coping - responding emotionally, acknowledging reality and reducing the feeling of being a burden. Radical acceptance,

Table 4

Theme 3	Codes	Interpretation
Regret, Loss, and Emotional Pain	Spiritual regret/guilt, Emotional closure not achieved, Relational regret, Chronicity of bereavement and loss, Family sorrow Hopelessness, Existential disappointment.	A large number of participants who harbor feelings of regret and grief due to failed relationships, living a deep disappointment with life's existential journey even into the old age reflects emotional tensions.

Table 5

Theme 4	Codes	Implications for practice
Moral and Life Lessons	Moral self-regulation, Ethical plan to live your life, Gender neutral Intergenerational knowledge	Cultural wisdom and ethics manifest from life experiences, Preventive wisdom, which participants wish to leave ethical upbringing and socialization, as a legacy to the next generation.

Table 6

Theme 5	Codes	Conclusion
Relationships and Belonging	Marital gratitude, Sense of belonging, Community support, Family rejection, Domestic violence, Familial rejection.	The participants describe the importance of strong marital and family relationships, but also stress experiences with rejection and

violence as well as alienation in community settings.

Table 7

Theme 6	Codes	Conclusion
Awareness and Social Insights	Emerging social justice consciousness, Life satisfaction, Family sorrow, Emotional withdrawal.	Exposure in old age homes generates new insights on social issues and personal fulfilment or retreat is influenced by past experiences.

Procedure
Stage 1: Preparation
1. Participants were interviewed in separate sessions to maintain privacy.
2. Informed consent was obtained before starting.
3. The study purpose and confidentiality assurances were explained clearly.

Stage 2: Interview Process
1. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked from the item pool.
2. Neutral probes (e.g., "Can you tell me more?", "How did that feel?") encouraged elaboration.
3. All interviews were fully audio-recorded.

Stage 3: Field Notes and Transcription
1. After each interview, researchers wrote field notes on impressions and non-verbal communication.
2. Audio files were transcribed verbatim.
3. Two team members verified transcripts for accuracy.

Stage 4: Data Verification and Coding
1. Unclear parts of the transcripts were reviewed and corrected.
2. Transcripts were uploaded into qualitative analysis software.
3. Two researchers (RS, KF) coded the data independently, then refined codes through discussion.

Stage 5: Ethical and Emotional Considerations
1. Participants' well-being was monitored throughout.
2. At the end of interviews, comfort levels were reassessed.

3. Participants were reminded of available emotional support resources.

Questionnaire (Sample Questions)
Key open-ended questions used in the semi-structured interviews included: Q1:
How long have you been living here?
Q2: How did you feel when you first came here?
Q3: What is the best part about living here?
Q4: What is your daily routine?
Q5: Do you have any special habit?
Q6: Is there anyone here, maybe from the staff or others, that you feel close to?
Q7: Is there anything or anyone that makes you feel truly at home?
Q8: Have you learned anything new after coming here?
Q9: Have you started seeing life from a new perspective?
Q10: Do you ever feel like you wish you could've done something different in life?
Q11: Is there any decision you made that you regret or think you made too Quickly?
Q12: With time, how did you accept your past, knowing that what has happened cannot be changed?
Q13: How did you accept this truth, or have you still not accepted it?
Q14: What part of the day do you like the most?
Q15: In your opinion, what is necessary to stay happy?
Q16: Is there a small thing that brings you a lot of joy?
Q17: What are you most thankful for in your life right now?
Q18: What is the most important lesson life has taught you that you would like to give as advice to young people?

RESULT
Identified Themes Thematic Findings
Faith and Spiritual Coping
Resilience and Coping with Adversity
Regret, Loss, and Emotional Pain
Moral and Life Lessons
Relationships and Belonging
Awareness and Social Insights

The analysis of interviews using the thematic approach identified six main themes that described the lived experiences of older adults living in long-term care institutions. These themes shed light on the connections between regret and happiness, and how they interact with faith, coping mechanisms, relationships, beliefs about life.

DISCUSSION
The findings revealed that older adults drew heavily on religious belief and spiritual practices to cope with the adversities of institutional life. Many accepted their suffering as part of divine will, expressing gratitude and finding solace in prayer and religious rituals, even when some admitted to feelings of spiritual regret. Alongside faith, participants demonstrated resilience by adapting to new circumstances, adjusting emotionally, and minimizing their dependence on others. While some adapted quickly, others took longer, yet the recurring theme was a desire not to burden their families.

Despite these coping mechanisms, regret and grief remained a powerful undercurrent. Participants lamented unresolved conflicts, severed family ties, and abandonment by children, experiences that often overshadowed moments of joy and created deep emotional pain. Yet, many reframed these struggles into moral lessons, emphasizing honesty, kindness, and strong family values for younger generations. Relationships were described as both a source of comfort and distress, with community bonds in old-age homes compensating for family rejection. Living in institutional settings also expanded social awareness: some elders reflected on systemic injustices and neglect of older adults, while others withdrew emotionally. Taken together, these insights show how faith, resilience, regret, moral wisdom, and social reflection interconnect to shape the emotional landscape of ageing in old age homes.

Table 1

Theme	Codes	Description
Faith and Spiritual Coping	Accepted the fate, spiritual regret, gratitude	Faith and prayer helped elders accept the suffering and find peace.
Resilience and Coping with Adversity	Acceptance, coping, adaptation, and avoided burdening others.	Elders adjusted emotionally Reality-based
Regret, Loss, and Emotional Pain	Family sorrow, relational regret, acceptance.	Participants express grief, regret, and existential disappointment.
Moral and Life Lessons	Moral values, perspective wisdom, guidance.	Elders offered lessons and advice for next generation.
Relationships and Belonging	Material, gratitude, belonging, rejection.	Relationships brought both comfort and rejection, community bonds were valued.
Awareness and Social Insights	social injustice, Life satisfaction, Emotional withdrawal.	Institutional living fostered awareness of society but also withdrawal.

Table 2. Summary of Emerging Themes

Themes	Codes	Description
Resilience and Coping with Adversity	Adaptive transitioning, Reality-based coping, Emotional adaptation, Radical acceptance, Burden avoidance	
Faith and Spiritual Coping	Accepted the fate, Spiritual regret/guilt, religious gratitude, Transcendence belief, Sacred time attachment	Participants relied on faith in Allah, religious practices, and destiny beliefs to endure suffering, find meaning, and maintain resilience. Faith provided both comfort and reconciliation, though some experienced guilt or regret over past spiritual shortcomings.
Regret, Loss, and Emotional Pain	Relational regret, Unresolved closure, Persistent grief, Family sorrow, Hopelessness, Existential disillusionment	Participants expressed deep regret over broken relationships, abandonment, and missed opportunities. Emotional pain, grief, and hopelessness were recurring themes, reflecting the heavy toll of separation from family.

Elders demonstrated strategies of adjustment and emotional adaptation. Many sought to accept reality, reduce dependency, and avoid being a burden on others while gradually adapting to institutional life.

Moral and Life Lessons Moral self-regulation, Ethical framework, Preventive wisdom, Intergenerational lessons

Many reframed their struggles into moral insights and guidance for younger generations. They emphasized honesty, kindness, and strong family ties, often hoping others would learn from their experiences

Awareness and Social Social injustice awareness, **Insight** Life satisfaction, Emotional withdrawal, Family sorrow Institutional living led to new reflections about society and family. Some participants highlighted social neglect of elders, while others withdrew emotionally or found partial satisfaction with institutional care

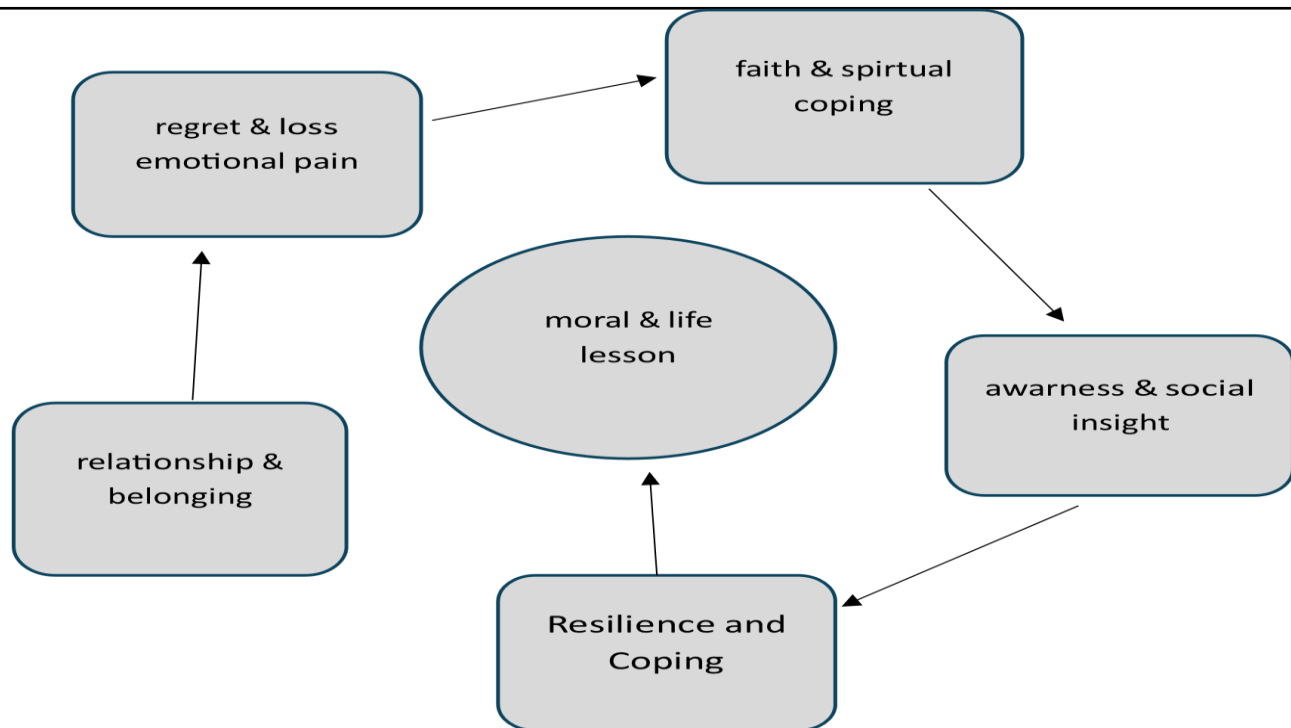|		
Relationships and Belonging	Marital gratitude, Community support, Familial rejection, Son violence, Belongingness	Relationships were described as both supportive and painful. While some found comfort in marital bonds or friendships in the home, others faced rejection and neglect from family, redefining belonging within community spaces

Figure 1

Scientific Interpretation of Thematic Relationships

The development of themes seems to follow a psychosocial process of adaptation in old age, similar to that proposed by theories of Gero transcendence, resilience and socioemotional selectivity.

The themes identified in this study reflect a psychosocial process of adaptation in old age, consistent with theories of gerotranscendence, resilience, and socioemotional selectivity.

Social connectedness was found to be crucial for well-being, while disrupted family ties often led to regret, grief, and emotional vulnerability. Insecure attachments within families emerged as significant precursors of negative emotional outcomes in later life.

At the same time, spirituality and religiosity served as protective resources that helped participants reinterpret regret and loss. Faith provided existential meaning, emotional acceptance, and resilience in the face of trauma, while cultural reflection encouraged individuals to place their suffering within a wider social context. This process echoes Erikson's notion of ego integrity, where older adults transform hardship into moral insight and a more compassionate outlook toward others.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access res Verbal wit and creative giftedness: contribution of social insight and awareness to interpersonal coping Karin Pfeiff Abstract Background How can gifted individuals' unusual mode of thought be described, when this also takes place in the verbal sphere?

Adversity

They turned social awareness into action when they learned that some of their acquaintances were practicing what the partnership considered risky sexual behavior. This is in line with resiliency models, proposing the more you acknowledge adversity, the better may individuals can release adaptive resources (e.g., acceptance, emotional regulation and burden aversion).

Resilience and Coping with Adversity → Moral and Life Lessons

The achievement of moral wisdom as the end product of resilience is consistent with gerotranscendence theory, which posits that older adults transcends their own personal pain to a place where they can convey ethical or spiritual lessons to younger people. They think in

the former of dying is desirable as it will not have been in vain (symbolic continuity), and they are looking for a rationale (to find a purpose).

Discussion
Introduction to Discussion
The purpose of the present research was to investigate regret and happiness among elderly people living in old homes in Pakistan. Analyses of the themes indicated six main thematic categories: Faith and Spiritual Coping, Resilience and Adversity, Regret/Loss/Emotional Pain, Moral/Life Lessons, Relationships/Belonging, and Awareness/Social Insight. The results emphasize that elders are burdened with unhealed regrets but also find strength in faith, community and resilience practices. The results are discussed with respect to the past literature, methodological strengths as well as limitations and implications.

Summary of Key Literature
Prior research suggests that regret in old age frequently involves the loss of family, occupation, and health (Newall et al., 2009). These findings are consistent with our results in that participants described unfinished mourning and family related regrets. Culturally, however, older participants' internal resources likewise weighted present-moment happiness through social connectedness and spiritual satisfaction (in accord with socioemotional selectivity theory; Carstensen et al., 1999).

Religiosity and spiritual coping have been observed to reduce negative emotions among institutionalized older adults in South Asia (Rahman et al., 2021) which corroborates the findings of our Faith and Spiritual Coping theme. In the same way, like resilience models propose that adapting and accepting things as inevitable are involved in how older adults cope with adversity (Wild et al., 2013). Our data supported this finding with the themes Resilience and Coping with Adversity and Awareness and Social Insight.

Method Summary
Descriptive phenomenology provided opportunity to delve into the experiences of lived world.
Rich, subjective accounts emerged from semi-structured interviews with three participants.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) furnished a structured and disciplined methodology for searching across the data in an exploratory manner. Ethical considerations verbal consent, confidentiality and psychological support ensured participants' well-being during the whole process.

Key Results and Themes
Faith and Spiritual Coping – Elders used prayer, fate beliefs and gratitude to cope with emotional pain.
Resilience and Dealing with Adversity – The participants referred to emotional adjustment, acceptance, and not imposing on others.
Regret, loss and emotional pain – Stories represented unprocessed grief, existential disappointment and relational regrets.
Ethical and Existential Lessons – Sr continued to construct experience as teaching for the young.
Relationships and Belonging – Happiness meant community, pain was a result of family rejection or violence.
Social Awareness and Wisdom – Living in an institution contributed to social consciousness through perception of social injustice as well as pondering on life satisfaction.
Taken together, these themes depict a spiraling cycle: belonging and repentance provoked dependence on faith; and that produced understanding, resolve and ultimately moral illumination.

Scientific Interpretation of Results
The thematic relationships coincide with theories of psychological aging. Life review theory (Butler, 1963), which indicates that in old age we may think back with regret as well as wisdom, clearly discernible here in Themes 1, 3 and 4. Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999) accounts for older people's interest in bonding with those who are meaningful to them and enjoying satisfaction in the here-and-now (Theme 2 and Theme 5). Religious coping models (Pargament, 1997) explicate why faith acts as an emotional buffer (Theme 1). Finally, research on resilience (Wild et al., 2013) indicates that adaptation and acceptance reduces the effects of regret, as is also in line with Theme 2 and Theme 6.

Limitations
Several limitations must be acknowledged:

1 Small sample size (N=3) affects generalizability.
2 Some elders refused to participate because of emotional pain; in some cases, this phenomenon cut short interviews.
3 Our limited training as student researchers might have influenced probing depth.

Greater attention was devoted to happiness than regret thus showing participants' reluctance to share painful memories.

Recommendations

1 Future research projects in other old age homes then need to include a wider variety and size of samples.

2 Mixed methods studies could contribute to more precise estimates of the association between regret, resilience and happiness.

3 Training employees in psychosocial support, as well as spiritual care, may assist elders with unresolved regret.

4 Policy should support in-home community programs to enhance belonging and decrease isolation.

Conclusion

This article adds to the literature on coexistence of regret and happiness in institutionalized elderly in Pakistan. Despite lingering regrets about family and missing out, participants actively pursue happiness in religion, mental toughness and companionship. These results have implications on strategies that focus on enhancement of social support and spiritual care, the promotion of resilience-building to enhancing emotional well-being at old age homes.

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