

MEANING IN LIFE AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN CONSERVATISM AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OLDER ADULTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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MEANING IN LIFE AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN CONSERVATISM AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OLDER ADULTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY (Abstract): Population aging presents growing challenges for maintaining quality of life in later adulthood. Conservative personal values and existential meaning are both associated with well-being in older adults, yet their functional relationship remains unclear. **Aim:** The present study aimed to investigate the mediating mechanism through which the presence of meaning in life influences the relationship between value conservatism and quality of life in older adults. **Materials and methods:** A sample of 210 participants (mean age = 74.5 years, SD = 6.24, 63.3% women) completed a battery of standardized questionnaires: the WHOQOL-OLD to assess quality of life, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire to assess existential meaning, and the Schwartz Value Survey to measure personal values. Mediation analysis was conducted using the *PROCESS macro* for *SPSS version 28* (Model 4), applying a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples. **Results:** The mediation analysis indicated that the presence of meaning in life partially mediated the relationship between conservatism and quality of life. Conservatism significantly predicted the presence of meaning ($b = 0.072$, $p = .017$), and the presence of meaning significantly predicted quality of life ($b = 0.129$, $p = .005$), even after controlling for conservatism. The indirect effect of conservatism on quality of life through the presence of meaning was significant ($b = 0.0093$; 95% CI [0.001, 0.024]), accounting for approximately 13.8% of the total effect. **Conclusions:** The findings demonstrate that conservative values enhance quality of life in older adults both directly and indirectly by strengthening existential meaning, providing empirical support for the development of integrated interventions focused on cultivating meaning and reinforcing stable values in the service of successful aging. **Keywords:** PRESENCE OF MEANING IN LIFE; VALUE CONSERVATISM; QUALITY OF LIFE; OLDER ADULTS; MEDIATION.

INTRODUCTION

Population aging represents one of the most significant demographic transformations of the twenty-first century. The central challenge of contemporary research is to ensure high quality of life in older age through the interaction between biological resources, social context, and psychologi-

cal mechanisms of adaptation (1). Quality of life is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical functioning, emotional well-being, social relationships, autonomy, and existential meaning (2, 3), with psychological and existential factors becoming increasingly important in advanced age (4).

Personal values represent stable motivational principles that guide behavior across the lifespan. Older adults increasingly prioritize conservation values-tradition, security, and conformity-as an adaptive strategy for maintaining identity coherence (5, 6). In parallel, meaning in life-defined as the perception that one's existence is coherent, significant, and goal-directed (7)-is associated with lower depression, better cognitive functioning, and reduced mortality in later adulthood (8, 9).

Although values and meaning have been studied as independent predictors of quality of life, their functional relationship remains insufficiently clarified. The present study proposes that value conservatism influences quality of life both directly and indirectly through the cultivation of existential meaning, grounded in continuity theory (10) and existential frameworks emphasizing meaning as a core psychological resource in later adulthood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants. The sample consisted of 210 community-dwelling older adults (mean age = 74.5 years, SD = 6.24, range = 65-91 years; 63.3% women) recruited from urban and peri-urban areas in northeastern Romania. Inclusion criteria were: (a) age \geq 65 years; (b) absence of severe cognitive impairment (MMSE score \geq 24); (c) ability to provide informed consent; and (d) willingness to complete self-report questionnaires. Participants were recruited through community centers, senior clubs, and religious organizations using convenience and snowball sampling.

Measurements. *Quality of life* was assessed using the World Health Organization Quality of Life Instrument for Older Adults (WHOQOL-OLD; 3), a 24-item self-report questionnaire measuring six

facets: sensory abilities, autonomy, past, present and future activities, social participation, death and dying, and intimacy. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all; 5 = completely), with higher scores indicating better quality of life. The Romanian version has demonstrated good psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha = .91 in the current sample).

Meaning in Life. Meaning in life was measured using the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; 11), which comprises two 5-item subscales: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = absolutely untrue; 7 = absolutely true). Only the Presence subscale was used in the current analyses. The Romanian version demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

Personal Values. Personal values were assessed using the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; 12), which measures ten basic values organized into four higher-order dimensions. For this study, we focused on the Conservation dimension, comprising three values: security, tradition, and conformity. Participants rated the importance of each value as a guiding principle in their life on a 9-point scale (-1 = opposed to my values; 7 = of supreme importance). A composite Conservation score was computed by averaging the three subscales (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

Procedure. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University. Data were collected between February and September 2024. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires in individual sessions lasting approximately 75 minutes. Participants provided written informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Statistical analysis Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were computed using *SPSS version 28.0*. To test the hypothesized mediation model, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4; 13), with value conservatism as the independent variable, quality of life as the dependent variable, and presence of meaning in life as the mediator. The significance of the indirect effect was assessed using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 resamples. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$, two-tailed.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations. Table I presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among study variables. Value conservatism was positively correlated with both presence of meaning in life ($r = .164, p = .017$) and quality of life ($r = .232, p < .001$). Presence of meaning was also positively associated with quality of life ($r = .220, p < .001$). All distributions approximated normality (Skewness $< |2.0|$, Kurtosis $< |2.0|$).

TABLE I.
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Overall quality of life	3.28	0.43	---	---
2. Presence of meaning in life	3.61	0.64	.22***	---
3. Conservatism values	6.39	1.47	.23***	.16*

M = mean; SD = standard deviation. N = 210. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Mediation analysis. Table II presents the results of the mediation analysis. Value conservatism significantly predicted presence of meaning in life (path a: $b = 0.072, SE = 0.03, t = 2.40, p = .017$). Presence of meaning significantly predicted quality of

life after controlling for conservatism (path b: $b = 0.129, SE = 0.05, t = 2.86, p = .005$). The direct effect of conservatism on quality of life remained significant after including the mediator (path c': $b = 0.058, SE = 0.02, t = 2.93, p = .004$).

TABLE II.
Mediation analysis examining the indirect effect of conservatism values on quality of life via presence of meaning in life

Model	Outcome variable	Predictor	B	SE	t	p
1	Presence of meaning in life	Conservation values	0.07	0.03	2.40	.017
2	Quality of life	Presence of meaning	0.13	0.05	2.86	.005
2	Quality of life	Conservation values	0.06	0.02	2.93	.004
Direct effect (c')	Quality of life	Conservation values	0.06	0.02	2.93	.004
Indirect effect (a x b)	Quality of life	Conservation -> Meaning -> QoL	0.0093	0.006	---	---

N = 210. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error.

The indirect effect was significant, 95% bootstrap 5000, CI [0.001, 0.024]. Proportion mediated = 13.8%.

The mediation model is illustrated in first figure. The total effect of conservatism on quality of life was significant ($c = 0.067$, $SE = 0.022$, $t = 3.05$, $p = .003$). The indirect effect through presence of meaning

was statistically significant ($ab = 0.0093$, $SE = 0.0057$, $95\% \text{ CI } [0.001, 0.024]$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect accounted for approximately 13.8% of the total effect.

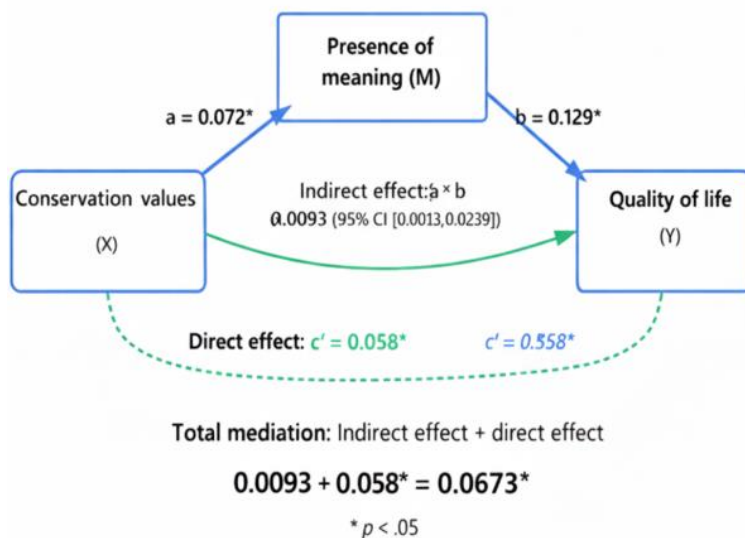


Fig. 1. Mediation model: the effect of conservation values on quality of life via presence of meaning in life

Legend for illustrations: X = independent variable; M = mediating variable; Y = dependent variable; $a = 0.072^*$ (path X → M); $b = 0.129^*$ (path M → Y); $c' = 0.058^*$ (direct path X → Y); Indirect effect: $a \times b = 0.0093$. $*p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the mediating role of presence of meaning in life in the relationship between value conservatism and quality of life among older adults. Results supported the hypothesized partial mediation model, indicating that conservative values promote quality of life both directly and indirectly through the

enhancement of existential meaning.

Consistent with continuity theory (10) and socioemotional selectivity theory (14, 15), our results demonstrate that conservative values serve adaptive functions in later adulthood by providing psychological anchors amid biological and social transitions. The significant indirect effect through presence of meaning reveals that conservative values actively facilitate the construction and maintenance of existential meaning, which in turn enhances well-being. By anchoring individuals in biographical continuity and social belonging, conservative values provide interpretive frameworks through which life experienc-

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es are organized into coherent narratives of purpose (16, 17).

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing quality of life in older adults may benefit from incorporating components that strengthen both existential meaning and value clarity.

Reminiscence therapy, life review interventions, and narrative approaches that help older adults articulate their core values and connect them to life experiences may be particularly effective.

Limitations and future directions.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences; longitudinal studies are needed to establish temporal precedence. Second, the sample was drawn from a culturally traditional context, which may limit generalizability. Third, reliance on self-report questionnaires raises concerns about common method variance. Future research should incorporate behavioral indicators and examine whether other value dimensions operate through different mediating mechanisms.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical support for the proposition that personal values influence quality of life in older adults through the cultivation of existential meaning. By demonstrating that conservative values enhance well-being both directly and indirectly via strengthened meaning in life, these findings advance understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying successful aging and underscore the importance of integrating value-based and meaning-focused interventions in gerontological practice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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