

# Süper Yaşlılık

## Super Aging

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### Öz

Süper yaşlılık, günümüzün yaşlanan toplumları bağlamında önemli ve gelişmekte olan bir konudur. Bu konunun sosyal hizmetin işlevleriyle ilgili boyutları literatürde incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışmada, 65 yaş ve üzeri yaşlıların yaşamlarına ilişkin başarılarını ortaya koyan “süper yaşlılık” ve boyutlarının incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu çalışma, 78 katılımcı (38 kadın, 40 erkek; yaşları 80 ile 93 arasında değişen 210 kişiden seçilmiştir) ile gerçekleştirildi. Süper yaşlılığın altı boyutlu psikolojik, sosyal, sağlıkla ilgili bir bireysel strateji olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bulgular, süper yaşlılık yaklaşımını benimseyen bireylerin hayatta kalmak için psikolojik, sosyal ve sağlık açısından yaşlanma algılarını güçlendirdiğini ortaya koydu. Süper yaşlılığın esneklik, psikolojik dayanıklılık, sosyal katılım, bilinç, inanç, sağlık boyutlarından oluştuğu ve yaşlanmanın biyolojik ve fiziksel etkilerini kontrol altına alarak psikolojik etkilerini en aza indirmeyi amaçlayan bir yaşlılık yaklaşımı olduğu ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: süper yaşlılık, başarılı yaşlanma, aktif yaşlanma, gerontoloji, sosyal hizmet

### Abstract

Super-aging is an important and developing issue in the context of today's aging societies. The dimensions of this issue related to the functions of social-work have not been studied in the literature. It was aimed to investigate “super-aging” and its dimensions, which reveal the success of elderly people regarding their lives aged 65 years and older in this study. This study was conducted in October 2019 with 78 participants (38 females, 40 males; selected from 210 individuals; ages ranging between 80 to 93). It was determined that super-aging is a six-dimensional psychological, social, health-related individual strategy. The findings revealed that individuals who adopt a super-aging approach strengthen their perceptions of aging in terms of psychological, social, and health to survive. It was revealed that super-aging consists of flexibility, psychological resilience, social participation, consciousness, belief, health dimensions and is an aging approach aiming to minimize the psychological effects of aging by controlling its biological and physical effects.

Key words: super aging, successful aging, active aging, gerontology, social work

## 1. Introduction

With the changing technology and innovations in the field of medicine, the elderly population gradually increases above the average population. This rapid acceleration brings along important social, political, and economic problems, especially in some countries. Due to the increase in the elderly population compared to the total population, consumer needs, management, strategy, health, social services, and many fields have improved.

Although the adaptation of the elderly to society, psychological support, interaction with technology, and health is important for every society, necessary measures should be taken to increase the elderly population at a certain rate (Yoshioka-Maeda, 2020). Increasing the elderly population to a significant rate in the total population has created the concept of super-aging.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), the population aged 65 years and older is more than 20% is defined as a super-aged society (Desa, 2015). This definition reveals the rise in the minority level of elderly people compared to the population of societies. Moreover, the association of the concept with the population ratio is the result of a political, sociological, and economic approach. On the other hand, it has been introduced as a concept related to super-aging neuropsychology. According to this approach, super-aging involves the protection of mental and psychological health (Armstrong, 2020; Drolet & Yoon, 2020). These basic factors (mental, psychological) prove that the individual maintains his / her psychological resilience, good cognitive level, free of dementia, and long-term self-health management level in the aging process (Olawa et al., 2020). However, according to this view, super-aging is different from physical health. This is due to physical health depends on many factors such as the external environment, genetics, hormones, etc (Bhandari & Paswan, 2020). Both approaches examine the situations presented by elderly people's longevity in different frameworks. While the social approach focuses on society-individual relations, the neuropsychological approach focuses on the mental and psychological state of the individual (Barber, et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). However, both approaches are far from revealing the main factors affecting "super-aging." Especially the community-based approach investigates the results rather than the causes of the super-aging of the individual (Siette et al., 2020). Because, according to this view, aging is an inevitable and natural condition. On the other hand, the neuropsychological approach investigates the neuropsychological causes of longevity and aging, and both approaches should be combined under a multidisciplinary approach, as the growing elderly population is an important social issue with the developments in technology and health.

The increasing number of individuals who have successfully passed the aging process, despite pandemics such as COVID 19, health problems, natural events, climate changes, digital and political developments, economic difficulties, increase the importance of super-aging and super-aged societies. According to the 2018 report of the

Gerontological Society of America, the USA, Japan, Germany, and Singapore are among the super-aged societies (GSA, 2018; Koohsari, Nakaya, & Oka, 2018). Especially in Germany, which is among these societies, the increase of scientists, technological development, social belief, and advances in medicine come to the fore. Being a federal parliamentary republic, Germany is important because it involves the global economy and different societies because it is one of the leading countries of Europe in the economic context. In this context, researching the reasons for the rapid increase in the elderly population is a current and necessary issue. On the other hand, there is a lack of research in the literature about the reasons for the success of super-aged societies related to aging. Structures of super-aged societies, characteristics of people have been performed in the literature as very few research subjects (Desa, 2015; GSA, 2018; Koohsari, Nakaya, & Oka, 2018).

Whether a country has a super aged group is an important and current issue. The definitions of WHO and the UN regarding super-aging have been associated with the population ratio of the countries aged 65 and over. However, this situation, which is tried to be put forward with the population and age group, is not an indicator of the type of elderly. In other words, keeping the elderly groups of the countries dependent on a certain percentage of the population is not sufficient to reveal this elderly type. Super aging is not just an elderly group of older people above a certain percentage of the population. Super aging represents elderly groups formed by the members of a society that has adopted a successful aging approach. This study aims to investigate "super-aging" and its dimensions, which reveal the success of elderly people regarding their lives aged 65 years and older..

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Health and psychology in aging

A decline in physical health is one of the biggest indicators and precursors of aging. The weakening in muscle and bone structures increases with age. These declines that occur in aging create a serious threat to health. Diseases such as sarcopenia and myopathy affect the individual's health negatively by limiting daily life activities. On the other hand, memory loss and amnesia that occur in old age negatively affect drug use, making it difficult to cope with diseases. Physical declines can cause psychological wear on the individual. Negative situations experienced during the aging process cause a decrease in psychological resilience. This situation affects psychological health.

Diseases such as anxiety, personality disorders, Alzheimer's disease, depression, paranoid psychosis are frequently seen in old age. Although the reasons for the emergence of these diseases vary, the possibility of their occurrence can be reduced by taking precautions beforehand. Factors such as negative experiences, the decline in family and friend relationships, social isolation, ageism (age discrimination) negatively affect the individual's psychology during the aging process. When these negative factors can be

strategically managed by the individual, a successful aging process can be revealed.

Health factor is given importance by individuals in super-aged societies. Mental health depends on the successful management of free of dementia, free of cognitive problems, psychological health psychosocial factors. Pre-determined measures by super-agers can overcome mental problems that occur with aging. This shows the importance of super-aged societies attaches to aging. Continuous check-ups in the field of health, education for the elderly, adaptation of developments in technology and informatics to the elderly, intergenerational cooperation activities (history pin, computer buddies, storytelling) can be shown as examples of measures taken. These activities and measures assist the individual to interact with the family, social environment, culture, and technology in the aging process.

## 2.2. Family and social relations in aging

The family has an important place in the life of the individual. In the aging process, the cultural and religious values of the family, the social class they belong, the bond between family members, family history, stronger positive relationships affect the lives of individuals. Family ties are strong in super-aged societies. Even if family members prefer independent life, ties are continued as they adopt cultural and familial values. Ongoing ties allow individuals to commit to life and positively affect their psychological state.

The decline (physical, psychological, social, health) of the elderly people living in the family is eliminated through the family members. Elderly individuals receive support from family members regarding their many needs. Support is provided by the family in the context of medical drug use, health care, feeding, and social needs of especially sick elderly individuals (eg., palliative). This situation positively affects the cognitive state.

## 2.3. Super-aged society

In 2019, 703 million people are 65 years old and over in the world and this population is gradually increasing. The most important reasons for this rate of increase are that the digital world facilitates daily life activities and technology brings important innovations in medical and many fields. According to the UN (2019) World population aging 2019 report, it is expected that one in six people in the world population will be 65 years or older by 2050. This ratio reveals the importance of super-aged societies aged 65 and over, which significantly affect the world population.

A population of 65 years and over is called "aging" if 7%, and 14% "aged" and "super-aged" (IEG, 2019a). The reason for making such a distinction is to determine the ratio of the elderly population to the total population, to take the necessary measures to reveal the needs of the elderly, to reveal macro and microeconomic problems, to identify social adaptation and social problems, to provide the necessary support according to the development levels of the countries, to increase the quality of life and welfare. Apart from this,

elimination of intergenerational differences, making necessary improvements in social work, education, employment, law, and policy are among other reasons.

Table 1. Super-Aged Countries in 2019

Count	%	Count	%	Country	%	Country	%
Slovenia	20	Estonia	20	Lithuania	20	Denmark	20
France	20	Latvia	20	Sweden	20	Malta	20
Croatia	20	Bulgaria	20	Germany	20	Greece	20
Finland	20	Portugal	20	Italy	20	Japan	20

Source: IEG, 2019b

According to the 2019 IEG-World Bank Group data, Slovenia, France, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, and Malta have 20% super-aged populations. Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Finland, Portugal, Italy, and Japan have a super-aged population of over 20%. Thanks to developing technology and innovations in medicine, this rate is increasing. Consumption expenditures of the increasing elderly population affect the economies of the countries. Public transfers are the main source of finance for the consumption of elderly people in Europe. As much as two-thirds of the consumption is met by these transfers. Increasing needs in many areas such as post-retirement pension pay, health expenditures, unemployment fund, social protection, housing allowance, and education increase the effects of the super-aged population on the economy. Therefore, super-aged societies and super-agers should be investigated.

With the increase in the elderly population, locomotive syndrome, which means the nursing care needs of the elderly, also increases. Long-term care is an important issue for super-agers. Physical and psychological declines that occur with aging can lead to the emergence of many diseases. Cognitive decline, memory loss, perception weakness, attention disorders, focus problems reveal important problems in daily life activities. For this reason, the increase in individuals over the age of 65 in society makes it necessary to investigate super-aged societies. In addition, the dimensions of this type of aging and the success factors in the growth rate of elderly people over 65 years of age is an important and up-to-date issue that needs to be researched. For this reason, the study aims to identify these factors and dimensions and contribute to the fields of gerontology, aging, and social sciences with the findings.

## 3. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted with individuals residing in Germany, one of the super-aged societies, to determine the

dimensions of super-aging. Germany is a super-aged society according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN). Access was provided to individuals through the LinkedIn business network. The surveys were sent to the participants via the LinkedIn mail system using the online Google questionnaire form. Necessary information about participation in the survey was notified to the participants by Inmail. The number of individuals whose residence was Germany was 382 among the 17,942 connections. 301 of the messages were read. Thus, the number of accessed people was 301. In the content of the message, it was stated that the online survey link, participation is voluntary, participation can be ended at every stage of the survey, and the responses are subject to confidentiality. As a result, this study was conducted in October 2019 with 78 participants (38 females, 40 males; selected from 210 individuals; ages ranging between 80 to 93).

The qualitative research methodology was adopted in the research. The survey questions were determined by a comprehensive literature review (Gerring, 2004; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Super ager, super-aged, super-aging, super-aged societies, 65 and over societies, 65+ societies concepts were scanned in databases. The scanned databases were as follows: Google Scholar, Elsevier, Emerald Insight, Taylor and Francis, Sage, Oxford University Press, Wiley, Springer, Scopus, Science Direct, Proquest. A total of seven questions were asked to the participants (Appendix 1). The question Q1 was asked to determine the dimensions of "super-aging". The theme headings were created by coding the responses given to the question. Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7 questions were asked about the theme headings and each dimension was subjected to content analysis.

The qualitative data obtained in this study, which was carried out with super-agers, which form the building blocks of super-aged societies, were processed by conceptualization, classification, and component analysis method, respectively. The processed data were analyzed by three academics who had not previously worked in this field (Maxwell, 1996; Spradley, 1980). The data were classified according to their relevance to the concept and subject through the coding process. The classified data was reconstructed according to the subject titles. Then, the data were listed under top and bottom headings with component analysis. Thus, the factors and concepts that are desired to be obtained were listed under related topics. The responses of the questions and theme headings were re-created and the dimensions that were initially created were compared. As a result, the dimensions of super-aging were conceptualized and reported.

#### 4. Results

According to the results of the qualitative research, the responses of the Q1 question asked to the participants identified six questions that reveal the dimensions of super-aging. The responses obtained during the bilateral interviews with the participants were written and the responses of all participants were compared. According to the responses, six top themes were identified (flexibility, psychological

resilience, social participation, consciousness, belief, health). A separate question was determined for each theme title and was asked the participants. Each response received from each participant were compared with the responses of the other participants under each theme title. Thus, internal consistency was achieved. As a result, the dimensions of super-aging were determined as flexibility, psychological resilience, social participation, consciousness, belief, and health (Table 1).

Table 1. Super-Aging Dimensions

Questions	Dimension	Q <sub>2,3,4,5,6,7</sub> **		Q1*	
		N	%	N	%
Q2	Flexibility	55	69,62	50	63,29
Q3	Psychological Resilience	57	72,15	49	62,03
Q4	Social Participation	49	62,02	51	64,56
Q5	Consciousness	58	73,42	50	63,29
Q6	Belief	65	82,28	69	87,34
Q7	Health	74	93,67	75	94,94

Vocabulary density: 0.731, Average words per sentence: 9.8;

\* Frequency and percentage of dimensions (within responses of Q1); \*\* Frequency and percentage of dimensions (within responses of their questions)

According to the qualitative finding analysis, six dimensions are grouped under three main headings (psychological, social, health-related). These basic dimensions constitute the psychological, social, health-related individual strategies of elderly individuals. The findings revealed that individuals who adopt a super-aging approach strengthen their perceptions of aging in terms of psychological, social and health to survive

#### 5. Discussion

Koohsari, M. J., Nakaya, T., & Oka, K. (2018) emphasized the need to investigate the active lifestyles of super-aged societies (Koohsari, Nakaya, & Oka, 2018). Park et al. (2014) made recommendations on anti-aging with an emphasis on super-aged. However, there is no empirical study of super-aging and its dimensions in the literature. This is the first qualitative empirical study to demonstrate the dimensions of super-aging.

Super-aging is a type of aging developed as an alternative to successful aging. The results of the research revealed that super-aging is a type of aging that aims to minimize the psychological effects by keeping the biological and physical effects of aging under control. This type of aging includes positive aspects of successful aging and active aging. The individual who aims at the idea of "Never give up" shows all the flexibility required for survival and quality living. Therefore, the first dimension of super-aging is "flexibility". The second dimension is "psychological resilience" developed by the individual to cope with psychological effects. This factor is similar to the "struggle against difficulties" dimension of successful aging (Özsungur, 2019a; Özsungur, 2019b). In super-aged societies, "social participation" is the third factor

due to the active participation of individuals in life, their social aspects, and the importance they attach to education.

The individual is aware of participation in the life and the joy of life. Therefore, "consciousness" was determined as the fourth factor. The fifth factor is "belief". According to super-aging, belief is a concept except believing in religious rituals. An individual's belief in himself/herself, in-laws, and ethical rules tie him to live. Therefore, the social factors, culture, and sense of justice come to the forefront. The key to survival and the last factor is "health".

The six dimensions identified by this study should be considered in the aging policies of super-aged communities. It is recommended that six-dimensional scale development studies for super-aging be carried out for future studies. Besides, the importance of six dimensions for sustainability should be adopted in the education and health policies of countries such as the USA, which are economically and socially developed. In developing countries, over 20% of the population aged 65 and over, and the emergence of a super-aged society depends on the adoption of policies regarding the dimensions of super-aging.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It was determined that super-aging consists of flexibility, psychological resilience, social participation, consciousness, belief, health dimensions and is an aging approach aiming to minimize the psychological effects of aging by controlling its biological and physical effects.

Psychological resilience and flexibility increase the strength of the individual to cope with the difficulties experienced. The individual applies these two basic factors to overcome the difficulties he/she experiences in the aging process. In practice, especially in home care and nursing services, the positive effects of these two factors on the individual's aging should be considered. On the other hand, the foundations of being a super-aged society depend on the individual's perspective on life and social participation. Health problems can be seen in all age groups. Therefore, attention should be paid in associating aging with illness or health. The anxiety of palliative patients and elderly people in nursing homes should be taken into consideration. On the other hand, individuals should be given aging awareness training.

The fact that the study is a qualitative study and the sample is elderly people is an important limitation in terms of data collection. Cultural differences between the researcher and the sample caused some limitations in the responses of the questions. In terms of cultural differences, the researcher's ability to predict the perception level of the sample through empathy and prepare the questions accordingly may create limitations in the data to be obtained. In this case, it is assumed that the study on generalization has a limitation. On the other hand, the level of sincerity in the responses of the sample of the research conducted in the digital environment may also create some limitations. In today's technology, the trust level of IoT users in clicking on links is very low due to the spam

emails (da Silva, Al-Khatib, & Tsigaris, 2020; Elenbaas et al., 2020).

For future studies, it is recommended to develop a scale related to the dimensions determined in this study. In addition, performing similar studies on samples with different cultural characteristics will contribute to gerontology and social work fields.

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#### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Questions	Dimensions	References
Q1. Can you tell about the things that keep you alive all your life?	Determining Dimensions	Gefen et al., 2014; Huentelman et al., 2018; Kaplan, A., & Rogalski, E. (2013; Muramatsu, N., & Akiyama, H. (2011
Q2. What do you think about your perspective on life in the aging process?	D1.Felexibility	Fernández-Ballesteros, R. (2008; Foster, L., & Walker, A. (2015; Michael, Y. L., Green, M. K., & Farquhar, S. A. (2006; Fernández-Ballesteros et al., 2013
Q3. What kind of path did you follow when you faced problems during your life?	D2. Psychological Resilience	Foster, J. R. (1997; Perna et al., 2012; Azeem, F., & Naz, M. A. (2015; Hassani et al., 2017
Q4. What is the importance of social activities in your life? What are the effects on your aging?	D3.Social Participation	Li et al., 2018; Tomioka, K., Kurumatani, N., & Hosoi, H. (2017; Pin, S., & Spini, D. (2016; Chanda, S., & Mishra, R. (2019
Q5. Can you tell about your awareness of your aging and your health?	D4.Consciou sness	Collins, E. M. (2018; Kim, S. Y., Oh, C. O., & Moon, K. J. (2017; Tajima et al., 2018

Q6. What is your belief in yourself, in the values of the society in which you are involved, justice? What are the effects of your belief on the aging process?	D5. Belief	Falkenhain, M., & Handal, P. J. (2003; Jensen, J., Counte, M. A., & Glandon, G. L. (1992; Nemmers, T. M. (2005; Iecovich, E., & Lankri, M. (2002
Q7. What do you do to live long and to be healthy?	D6. Health	Gefen et al., 2014; Randolph, J. J. (2018; Nakamura, K. (2009; Suzuki, T. (2018; Kuzuya, M. (2012; Muramatsu, N., & Akiyama, H. (2011

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Fahri Özsunğur, Assoc. Prof., was graduated from Atatürk University Faculty of Law, Hacettepe University Department of Family and Consumer Sciences PhD. and Aksaray University Department of Business PhD. He serves as a Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) Examiner /PhD Examiner for the University of New England. He is a Eurostars Technical Expert (EUREKA Secretariat). He is affiliated to Adana Chamber of Commerce Department of Trade Registry Office in the province of Adana in Turkey, Adana Science and Technology University, Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Çağ University, WEGATE- European Gateway for Women’s Entrepreneurship and Canadian Institute for International Law Expertise (CIFILE). He has 4 books, 9 book chapters, and more than 78 published articles and 18 international conference papers. He is the editor of 14 Journals, and the reviewer of 209 Journals.