







ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Level of self-transcendence in older adults from a rural community in Mexico*

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Evidence of the level of self-transcendence.
2. Positive results in older adults from a rural community.
3. Relationship between self-transcendence and religion.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to determine the level of self-transcendence in older adults in a rural community. **Method:** a quantitative, observational, cross-sectional study. It was carried out in a rural community in Guanajuato, Mexico, from February 2022 to November 2023, with 114 older adults. Older adults belonging to the community, men and women aged ≥ 60 years, were included. The Self-Transcendence Scale in Spanish was used, with a score between 15 and 60 (higher score = higher level of self-transcendence). **Results:** the mean self-transcendence score was 54.13 points. The majority identified with finding meaning in their spiritual beliefs (90.4%) and accepting help when needed (91.2%), with an association being found between self-transcendence and religion ($X^2=23.72^a$, $p<0.01$). **Conclusion:** older adults recognize the process of self-transcendence, adjusting to life experiences. The importance of addressing the spiritual and psychosocial dimensions in the care of older adults is highlighted. Nurses can promote self-transcendence among older adults to promote their meaning in life.

DESCRIPTORS: Aged; Geriatric Nursing; Life Course Perspective; Spirituality; Rural Population. Organizations and Administration.

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INTRODUCTION

Self-transcendence is known as an individual multidimensional expansion of any person, reaching a state of self-acceptance, relating to other individuals and the environment that surrounds them and with other dimensions beyond¹.

To transcend, older adults can enter a reflection meeting where they can gain clarity to make appropriate decisions and determine the actions that lead them to well-being². Self-transcendence is a source of energy, which a person relates to their strength of support to continue living and to the satisfaction of life experiences.

Self-transcendence implies a sense of wholeness of each human being, where they have the ability to expand their own boundaries in different ways that improve their well-being. These boundaries can be expanded intrapersonally, interpersonally, transpersonally and temporally¹. Addressing self-transcendence in older adults refers to the satisfaction of one's own needs, the environment and others, resulting in a positive or negative effect on mental/emotional well-being, health and functioning³.

According to the above, a study was found on self-transcendence in retired university older adults, which shows that 60% correspond to a high level of self-transcendence and 40% have an average level. This explains why older adults consider their goals and achievements achieved, without failing to consider new objectives⁴. When older adults know how to face any circumstance or deal with any problem, it is important to know that they are in a good state of self-transcendence, showing that their goals, activities and objectives have been achieved.

Another study on self-transcendence in older adults from gerontological centers considers a percentage of 51.36%, which is higher in people between 75 and 84 years old, however, in women, it reflects a higher percentage than in men, with 52.05%³. It is concluded that older adults have a high level of self-transcendence. Likewise, this phenomenon is more representative in women, indicating that females have a good capacity to expand their limits intrapersonally and transpersonally, as they have a strong connection with spirituality and the meaning of their beliefs. On the other hand, this characteristic is related to the pleasure and satisfaction of living in older adults' life stage³. A study carried out in Peru showed important results, indicating that there are high levels of self-transcendence in older men and women⁴.

The Theory of Self-Transcendence emerged by integrating aspects of the health and development processes of people who care, where these people value their lives according to the context in which they find themselves, experiencing a state of well-being, fulfillment and satisfaction with themselves, allowing an intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal connection¹.

Therefore, the aim was to determine the level of self-transcendence in older adults from a rural community.

METHOD

This study is quantitative, non-experimental, observational, cross-sectional and prospective. It was carried out from February 2022 to November 2023 in a rural community in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, with a population of 135 people.

Convenience sampling was carried out, obtaining a representative sample of 114 older adults.

Older adults from rural communities, men and women aged ≥ 60 years and who provided informed consent, were included. Older adults with cognitive alterations measured by the Mini-Mental State Examination with a score lower than 24 points were excluded.

For data collection, the survey technique was used, with two instruments being applied: the first consisted of sociodemographic data to characterize the population studied; and the second was the Self-Transcendence Scale (STS)¹. This scale consists of 15 Likert-type items, where 1 = not at all and 4 = very much. The possible scores are from 15 to 60, where the higher the score, the greater the self-transcendence. Generally, between the ages of 15 and 30 is considered a low level of self-transcendence; from 31 to 45, is considered a moderate level; and from 46 to 60, is considered a high level of self-transcendence, allowing the measurement of each person's social and spiritual resources¹. To apply this scale, permission was requested from the author, who provided the instrument in the Spanish version for use. The instrument reliability according to Cronbach's alpha is 0.80^{1,3}.

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To prepare the sociodemographic questionnaire, social and personal aspects were taken into consideration, such as age, sex, occupation, marital status, education, religion and illness, with the aim of highlighting important points for the research.

Data were collected and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences® (SPSS) version 24. Descriptive statistics were used for sociodemographic variables, obtaining frequency distribution and percentages, minimums and maximums. For the self-transcendence variable, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and measures of central tendency) and inferential statistics were used, using Pearson's X^2 to observe the only association between self-transcendence and religion. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to verify the normality of the data and, then, Spearman's test was used to establish the relationship between age and self-transcendence, since the data presented a non-normal distribution.

To support participant participation, the Informed Consent Form was included, which was read and signed by older adults. The research and ethics procedures were followed and respected, and the research was approved by the Research Committee of the Health Sciences and Engineering Division of the Celaya-Salvatierra Campus of the *Universidad de Guanajuato*, under registry CIDSIC-060709-22. Furthermore, the ethical guidelines for research established by the General Health Law on Health Research, the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human beings and the international ethical guidelines for health-related research involving human beings of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences were taken into account.

RESULTS

Study participants were 114 older adults with a mean age of 72.22 years ($SD \pm 8.119$, Min. 60, Max. 93). The adults with the highest participation were between 65 and 78 years old. Table 1 presents the data regarding the profile of older adults.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of older adults. Guanajuato, Mexico, 2023

Variables		f	%
Sex	Female	78	68.4
	Male	36	31.6
Occupation	Housewife	75	65.8
	Employed	6	5.3
	Other	33	28.9
Other occupation	Peasant	29	25.4
	Construction worker	2	1.8
	Music teacher	1	0.9
	Mason	1	0.9
Marital status	Married	72	63.2
	Widowed	31	27.2
	Single	6	5.3
	Stable union	4	3.5
	Divorced	1	0.9
Educational level	None	61	53.5
	Incomplete elementary school	39	34.2
	Complete elementary school	11	9.6
	Complete high school	3	2.6
Religion	Catholic	101	88.6
	Christian	8	7.0
	No religion	2	1.8
	Jehovah's Witness	2	1.8
	Other	1	0.9
Other religion	Apostolic	1	0.9
Disease	No disease	37	32.5
	Other	23	20.2
	Two or more diseases	19	16.7
	Hypertension	17	14.9
	Diabetes mellitus	16	14.0
	Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	2	1.8

Legend: f = frequency; % = percentage; (n=114).

Source: the authors (2023).

The level of self-transcendence was assessed and a test was performed to verify the normality of the data from the sample, using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Due to the sample size, a confidence level of 95% and $p < 0.05$ were considered, which showed that the sample data presented a non-normal distribution. Table 2 displays mean self-transcendence.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of self-transcendence and K-S test. Guanajuato, Mexico, 2023

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	D ^a	p
Self-Transcendence Scale	54.13	4,65	35	60	0.144	0.000

Legend: SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; Da = Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test; p = two-sided asymptotic significance; (n=114).

Source: the authors (2023).

To interpret the scale results, the level of self-transcendence was classified as low (15-30), moderate (31-45) and high (46-60), highlighting that the higher the score, the higher the level of self-transcendence. Table 3 shows the level of self-transcendence.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of self-transcendence. Guanajuato, Mexico, 2023

Categories	f	%
High (46 to 60 points)	109	95.6
Moderate (31 to 45 points)	5	4.4

Legend: f = frequency; %= percentage; (n=114).

Source: the authors (2023).

Concerning STS characteristics, older adults identify with the statements "Let others help me when I need it" (91.2%) and "Find a meaning in my faith/spiritual belief" (90.4%), with "Let go of the sense of loss in my past" (53.5%) being less expressed.

For the variables age and self-transcendence, the relationship was sought using Spearman's test, since the STS data presented a non-normal distribution, finding a weak negative relationship ($\rho = -0.071$, $p < 0.05$), but this was not significant ($p = 0.45$).

Concerning the association of self-transcendence with demographic variables through Pearson's X^2 , it is observed that there is an association between the religion variable and the self-transcendence variable, while the other variables are not related to the self-transcendence variable. Table 4 shows the association between self-transcendence and sociodemographic variables.

Table 4. Association of demographic variables with the Self-Transcendence Scale. Guanajuato, Mexico, 2023

Sociodemographic variable	X^2	p
Sex	2.214 ^a	0.120
Occupation	2.719 ^a	0.257
Marital status	0.828 ^a	0.935
Educational level	0.735 ^a	0.865
Religion	23.722^a	0.000
Disease	5.784 ^a	0.328

Legend: X^2 = Pearson's chi-square test; p= two-sided asymptotic significance; (n=114).

Source: the authors (2023).

DISCUSSION

The results show the importance of addressing the psychosocial aspects of aging and their repercussions on old age, on the one hand, due to the importance they generate, and on the other, due to the growing number of older adults. At the state level, a study was carried out to understand older adults' status and health conditions

according to the *Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística* (INEGI)⁵, provision of data on prevention in terms of disability, mortality, education, loss of functionality and promotion of active and healthy aging, in which a low level of dependence or physical limitation was found⁵, according to this study, where a high level of dependence was not found, but rather a higher percentage of the state of independence.

The sociodemographic data found in this study clarify that 68.4% correspond to women, and agree with state data from the *Consejo Nacional de Población* (CONAPO)⁶, mentioning a greater number of elderly women than men. In 2022, there were 136 women for every 100 men, and this could be a condition for achieving greater participation of women. These numbers are similar in the 46 municipalities of the state of Guanajuato⁶.

The mean age of the older adults who participated in this study was 72.22 years, an age very close to the mean life expectancy estimated by CONAPO for 2023 in the state of Guanajuato, which is 72.23 years⁶, which shows a small difference between the two ages of participants, approaching the state's life expectancy.

Regarding employment, evidence shows impacts on employment among Mexico's elderly population. As there is greater exposure to the economy⁷, wage inequality has decreased over time and informal jobs have emerged. The data found in this study show that the largest occupation is housewife (women), followed by farmers and other older adults who have another unknown occupation, but which is not a formal job.

Concerning education data, 53.5% of older adults did not have any level of education, a higher percentage than that reported by INEGI on illiteracy, where it is found that 33.7% of the elderly population of Guanajuato is still illiterate⁷. On the other hand, it was observed that women have a higher level of education than men.

The percentage of older adults who are Catholic in this study is 88.6%, which agrees with INEGI data on older adults in the state of Guanajuato with a greater predominance of the same religion, and Guanajuato continues to be one of the states with the largest Catholic religion in the country, with 86.5% of people who profess it⁸. These data reveal a high percentage of religion among older adults, whose inspiration is a topic of great importance for planning comprehensive care that includes and respects the beliefs of each person being cared for.

The STS results show a moderate level of self-transcendence (4.4%) and a high level (95.6%) in older adults from a rural environment ($\chi^2=54.13$), a result higher than those found in unemployed older adults from a Peruvian university⁴, finding an average level, with 40%, and a high level, with 60%⁴. Another study⁹ in the elderly population found a high level of self-transcendence ranging from 45 to 58 points⁹, which seems to be slightly higher than the results of this study, finding an average level of 4.4% and a high level of 95.6%. Considering that there were both levels (average and high), the older adults in this study are at a high level of self-transcendence.

Unlike a study carried out in Turkey with institutionalized older adults, all presented an average level of self-transcendence¹⁰, i.e., a percentage lower than the results of this study, with a high level of 95.6%. The comparison study with institutionalized populations may be an approach of interest to determine the factors that influence self-transcendence in community environments versus institutionalized environments.

In a study, older adults recognize the process of self-transcendence, adapting to the present experiences of their lives and attributing positive meaning to negative experiences¹¹. These experiences are related to the items in this study of finding

meaning in past experiences (64.9%) and overcoming things that were important and are now not (55.3%), presenting the lowest scores in STS.

The study also found that, when receiving geriatric care and learning about the process of self-transcendence, they expressed acceptance of aging, pleasure in activities, acceptance of death as part of their lives and the importance of spiritual beliefs¹¹, in addition to comments related to the items on finding meaning in spiritual beliefs (90.4%) and accepting help when needed (91.2%), percentages that stand out in the present study. Therefore, it is clear that the spiritual dimension is of great importance in old age and in accepting help.

As for STS characteristics, the older adults in this study identified with the meaning of their spiritual beliefs (90.4%), accepting help when needed (91.2%), helping young people (79.8%), taking an interest in their own things (78.1%), enjoying life (78.1%), and accepting that they are growing older (77.2%). This refers to another study by Guerrero and Lara, in which self-transcendence increases and is related to greater meaning in "Find a meaning in my faith/spiritual belief" (85.6%), "Enjoy my life journey" (81.4%), and "Let others help me when I need it" (69.5%)³.

Older adults are identified with spiritual aspects, enjoying life and accepting help from others. In another study carried out with older adults¹², it was found that older adults have the ability to face any situation and/or context in which they find themselves as well as manage their emotions and seek support from others when they need it.

A reflective study focused on care and self-transcendence conceptualizes that this is a process of cognitive maturation that helps resolve conflicts, integrating the positive and negative experiences of older adults to shape their current self¹³. This process of self-transcendence allows older adults to be a complete being in their emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions, which allows them to accept themselves and feel integrated into society, in addition to accepting the changes that occur during the aging phase.

These findings have been identified in other studies¹⁴⁻¹⁵ that describe self-transcendence in the intrapersonal dimension, where adults maintain high hope and fulfillment, which leads them to states of enjoying life, allowing them to connect positively with well-being, health, mental/emotional functioning and their environment.

A meta-analysis focused on the study of self-transcendence in the elderly population found a mean of 43.54¹⁶, which is low compared to the average of this study 54.13, indicating considerable variation in the mean self-transcendence score in the studies included in the meta-analysis, with the majority of older adults presenting illness, dependence, frailty and depression¹⁶.

Age is a personal factor that can influence self-transcendence and can have a positive or negative influence, depending on the theory. However, this study highlights that in the case of older adults in a rural community there is no relationship between age and self-transcendence, coinciding with another study⁴, which pointed out that there is no relationship between age and self-transcendence. Therefore, these theory-based results can be revised based on characteristics and other personal or contextual factors.

According to the Theory of Self-Transcendence¹, religion is a personal/contextual factor that is related to social constructions that obey a cult and that the person is capable of including feelings of power, beyond human understanding. In this study, a relationship was found between religion and self-transcendence, while no relationship

was found with the other variables (sex, occupation, marital status, education and illness). And in a study carried out in Peru, no relationship was found between self-transcendence and sociodemographic variables⁴. It is clear that religion is important, as it helps older adults not to lose faith and to be more aware of themselves for self-care.

According to the Theory of Self-Transcendence¹, when an older adult is diagnosed with a disease, they are in a vulnerable stage and, in the process of self-transcendence, there are personal/contextual factors that intervene so that a person can transcend and thus overcome the vulnerability. On the other hand, the Theory of Self-Transcendence can be experienced at different levels and, therefore, can help people achieve greater well-being, allowing them to expand their limits at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, transpersonal and temporal level¹⁷.

When a person has a high level of self-transcendence, they integrate all their life experiences up to the present, including their past, to try to recapitulate these experiences and reflect on themselves in their general environment.¹ The study also indicates that, for older adults, the search for well-being becomes necessary¹⁸. Similarly, in rural areas, it has been identified that meaning of life is influenced by several factors, including self-transcendence¹⁹. Therefore, it is increasingly necessary to approach old age in the sense of its vital integration to find this meaning in life.

According to the theoretical adaptation of the Theory of Self-Transcendence, there were contextual factors that only related self-transcendence to one contextual factor, which is religion. Self-transcendence can increase people's self-care according to the context in which the person finds themselves, combined with a chronic-degenerative disease, loss of family members, retirement, among other factors that influence the environment of older adults.

However, according to what the theory supports in this research, it can be argued that self-transcendence, according to the results obtained, clarifies that older adults may or may not have a good level of self-transcendence, and is not associated with sociodemographic variables such as age, sex, occupation, marital status, education and illness, only with religion.

Conducting this study on self-transcendence in older adults was enriching, since no studies have been found to date addressing this study variable in a rural community in the state of Guanajuato. On the other hand, it was a great challenge to live with the elderly population to learn about the characteristics of each caregiver and how they feel emotionally, physically and spiritually. According to the Theory of Self-Transcendence, there is a process for older adults to transcend themselves and have the capacity for self-acceptance, to relate to their environment and others, to connect with other dimensions, allowing decision-making in life crises¹. Ultimately, this process leads older adults to their own well-being. This process can be applied to any population, as it is the responsibility of nursing professionals to guide society on their self-care.

On the other hand, the aim is to provide knowledge about self-transcendence to implement nursing care and try to satisfy the needs expressed by older adults.

Regarding limitations, it can be considered that convenience sampling may limit the generalization of results, since it does not necessarily reflect a representative distribution of the general population of older adults in the state where the study was carried out, but represents a look at the study community's needs.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research demonstrated high levels of self-transcendence scores in older adults, where it was concluded that the majority of older adults achieved their goals and objectives. Due to this, nursing professionals' attention is fundamental to address self-transcendence not only in this population, but in the general population.

Self-transcendence is a phenomenon of great importance to be addressed in the elderly population. When thinking about the phase of old age in conjunction with self-transcendence, it is believed that it is a phase in which people present greater emotional and cognitive maturity that does not cause problems to themselves, since the years that have passed allow them to build and reflect on a person.

Finally, it is important to continue research related to issues of self-transcendence, which will provide guidance on how to meet the elderly population's needs.

The contribution of this research is substantial in addressing knowledge about the process of self-transcendence in each act of caring, allowing a better view of this and the interaction between the caregiver and the person being cared for. On the other hand, contributing to the discovery and awareness of self-transcendence allows the incorporation and implementation of theories that support care and satisfaction of individuals' needs. The study highlights the importance of addressing the spiritual and psychosocial dimensions in the care of older adults, aligning with nursing practices that promote a holistic approach to care, in addition to nurses being able to encourage self-transcendence among older adults, through the integration of practices that stimulate personal reflection, spiritual support and the process of adaptation to changes in older adults' lives.

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Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work -

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Martínez Ramírez JG, Guerrero Castañeda RF, Silva Moreno AA, Aguilar Machain P, Martínez Ramírez I; Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved - **Martínez Ramírez JG, Guerrero Castañeda RF, González Soto CE, Aguilar Machain P.** All authors approved the final version of the text.

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