

# The Relationship between Regret and Subjective Well-being in Middle-Aged Men

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**Abstract.** This study aimed to investigate the effects of regret characteristics differences and regret coping style of middle-aged men's subjective well-being. Data were collected from men aged between 40 and 60 years in D-city and K-do using a self-administered questionnaire. Data analysis was performed by conducting a t-test, ANOVAs and Pearson's correlation coefficients using SPSS/WIN 21.0 and hierarchical regression analyses. Results of hierarchical regression analyses revealed that professionals, those with higher monthly incomes, and those with higher regret rumination and goal disengagement tended to have higher life satisfaction. Psychological well-being tended to be more positive when regret rumination was higher and more negative when regret frequency was higher.

**Keywords:** Life Satisfaction, Middle aged men, Psychological well-being, Regret, Subjective well-being

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

While many middle-aged men exert their influences in personal, family, and social environments and enjoy a stable life, they also experience various physical, emotional, and social changes. Middle-aged men are responsible for various roles in families and societies and should be prepared for retirement and life during old age [1].

Regret refers to a negative emotion that one experiences by realizing or imagining that the present situation would be better if one had chosen another option in the past[2]. Regret coping styles vary depending on the individual, including regret rumination, goal disengagement, and pursuit of alternative goals. Regret rumination means to ruminate on what happened in the past [3].

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Acceptance and coping with regretful past experiences greatly affect adaptation to becoming middle-aged and subjective well-being. If one is unable to cope with regretful past behaviors properly and fails to escape from negative emotions such as despair and disappointment, life satisfaction becomes lower and negative emotions are experienced.

Therefore, this study investigated the regret intensity, frequency, levels, and categories of middle-aged men in South Korea. Moreover, we measured the regret coping styles of middle-aged men including regret rumination, goal disengagement, and pursuit of alternative goals, in order to identify the effect of regret on the subjective well-being of middle-aged men. The results will be useful for development of a program that promotes the subjective well-being of middle-aged men depending on their regret coping styles as fundamental data.

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate regret characteristics, regret coping styles, and the levels of subjective well-being of middle-aged men. Moreover, we examined the relationships between major variables and factors affecting subjective well-being.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Study Design

The present study uses a descriptive survey method to ascertain the effects of regret appraisals and coping styles of regret on subjective well-being in middle-aged men. This descriptive research study model is shown in Figure 1.

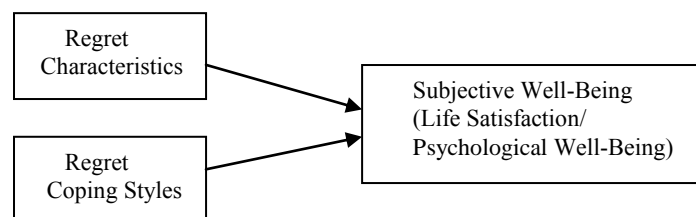


Fig. 1. Mediating Model

## 2.2 Participants and Data Collection

40–65 year old women were recruited as subjects from among the parents of students at two universities in D city and K province. The survey was conducted by the current researchers and two other trained researchers from August 23 to September 23, 2015. A minimum sample of 103 participants for the hierarchical regression analysis model was calculated using G\* Power assumption effect size of 0.15, a power of 0.80, a significance level 0.05, and 7 independent variables. Data were collected from 110 participants who agreed to participate in the study. Of these, two were excluded for being incomplete; therefore, 108 questionnaires were analyzed. Consequently, this research had an appropriate number of participants.

## 2.3 Instruments

### Regret Appraisals

For regret appraisals, the regret domain, intensity, and frequency were measured. The regret domain was measured using the scale of life's major regret domains by Roesse & Summerville (2005) [4], and adapted by Mi-Jeong Joo (2009)[5]. This scale consists of 12 regret domains. Regret intensity and regret frequency measures using the 7-point scales of Mi-Yeong Han et al. (2010)[6]. These scales range from 1–7 points, with higher scores representing higher regret intensity or frequency.

### Coping Styles of Regret

Regret coping styles were measured using the coping styles scale for regret experiences in old age, developed by Kyung Yoo (2010)[7], based on a previous study by Wrosch et al. (2003)[8]. The scale is composed of a total of 12 questions, 4 questions each for the sub-factors of regret rumination, goal separation, and pursuit of alternative goals. This instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores signifying positive regret coping styles. In this study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .69 overall, .80 for rumination on regret, .81 for goal separation, and .66 for establishment of alternative goals.

### Subjective Well-Being

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985)[9]. This instrument consists of 5 questions each measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with total scores in the range of 5–35 points, and higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient in the present study was .90.

Psychological well-being was measured using the Intensity and Time Affect Scale (ITAS) of Diener, Smith, and Fujita (1995)[10]. This instrument consists of a total of 24 questions measured on a 7-point Likert scale. The range of possible scores is 24–

158 points, with higher scores indicating more positive psychological well-being. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient in this study was .92.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS/WIN 21.0, and descriptive statistics, such as frequency, means, and standard deviation, were used to analyze general characteristics, regret appraisals, and the main variables in the present study. T-tests and ANOVAs were used to test the differences between general characteristics, regret appraisals, and the main variables, while Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to analyze correlations between the main variables. A hierarchical regression analysis was used to analyze the impact of general characteristics, regret appraisals, and coping styles of regret on subjective well-being.

## 3 Results

The explanatory power of each factor affecting subjective well-being was analyzed through a hierarchical regression analysis. In Model 1, the variables of professional occupations and more than 600 million wons of monthly income explained 19.2% ( $F=7.391, p<.001$ ) of the life satisfaction variable, the variable of more than 600 million wons of monthly income explained 22.1% ( $F=6.056, p<.001$ ) of the life satisfaction variable in Model 2, and the variables of professional occupations, more than 600 million wons of monthly income, regret frequency section 3, regret rumination and goal disengagement explained 30.3% ( $F=6.178, p<.001$ ) of the life satisfaction variable in Model 3, all of which were statistically significant. The most influencing factor on satisfaction of life was more than 600 million wons of monthly income ( $\beta=.258, p=.005$ ). (Table 1).

**Table 1. Factors Affecting the Life Satisfaction of Participants (N =108)**

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	T	B	$\beta$	t
Education level	.933	.066	.719 (.474)	1.016	.072	.797 (.427)	.851	.060	.687 (.494)
Professionals heap	2.921	.202	2.244 (.027)	2.511	.173	1.937 (.056)	2.521	.174	2.052 (.043)
More than 600 M wons of monthly income heap	6.28	.361	4.043 ( $<.001$ )	5.757	.331	3.720 ( $<.001$ )	4.478	.258	2.893 (.005)
Less than 200 M wons of monthly income heap	-1.764	-.074	-.838 (.404)	-.635	-.027	-.298 (.766)	-.966	-.041	-.474 (.636)
Regret frequency section 1 heap				1.403	.100	1.028 (.306)	.616	.044	.465 (.643)
Regret frequency section 3 heap				-2.771	-.156	-1.677 (.097)	-3.277	-.185	-2.057 (.042)

Regret rumination					.597	.198	2.303 (.023)
Goal disengagement					.455	.184	2.070 (.041)
Pursuit of alternative goals					.479	.158	1.792 (.076)
Constant	13.875	6.485 ( $<.001$ )	13.818		6.320 ( $<.001$ )	-3.515	-6.92 (.491)
$R^2$		.222		.265			.362
$R^2_{adj}$		.192		.221			.303
$F$ ( $p$ )		7.361 ( $<.001$ )		6.056 ( $<.001$ )			6.178 ( $<.001$ )

In order to investigate the factors that impact psychological well-being, In Model 1, the healthy variable in perceived health explained 16.1% ( $F=7.863$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of the psychological well-being variable, the healthy variable in perceived health and the variable of 3 or higher in regret frequency section explained 26.3% ( $F=8.640$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of the psychological well-being variable in Model 2, and the variables including perceived health, 3 or higher regret frequency section, regret rumination and goal disengagement explained 40.2% ( $F=11.266$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of the psychological well-being variable in Model 3, and all of these showed statistically significant results. The best variable explaining psychological well-being was regret rumination ( $\beta=.371$ ,  $p<.001$ ). (Table 2).

**Table 2. Factor Affecting the Psychological Well-Being of Participants (N = 108)**

Independent variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	t
Administrative and office job heap	2.871	.078	.874 (.384)	1.020	.028	.327 (.744)	.181	.005	.064 (.949)
Healthy heap	13.039	.382	3.805 ( $<.001$ )	15.358	.450	4.643 ( $<.001$ )	13.751	.403	4.541 ( $<.001$ )
Bad healthheap	-3.807	-.083	-.828 (.410)	-1.499	-.033	-.345 (.731)	2.699	.059	.668 (.506)
Regret frequency section 1 heap				5.735	.166	1.810 (.073)	3.104	.090	1.070 (.287)
Regret frequency section 3 heap				-10.707	-.244	-2.593 (.011)	-9.564	-.218	-2.544 (.012)
Regret rumination							2.761	.371	4.568 ( $<.001$ )
Goal disengagement							.971	.158	2.057 (.042)
Constant	108.857		37.506 ( $<.001$ )	104.255		28.672 ( $<.001$ )	56.370		4.775 ( $<.001$ )
$R^2$		.185			.298			.441	
$R^2_{adj}$		.161			.263			.402	
$F$ ( $p$ )		7.863 ( $<.001$ )			8.640 ( $<.001$ )			11.266 ( $<.001$ )	

## 4 Conclusions

This study identified the influences of regret characteristics and regret coping styles on subjective well-being in middle-aged men. Life satisfaction increased in men that were professionals, had a higher monthly income, had more regret rumination, and had better goal disengagement. Psychological well-being increased in men that had healthier perceived health, had more regret rumination, had better goal disengagement, and had higher regret frequency.

In the future, it will be necessary to conduct repeated studies with Korean middle-aged men; however, this study's fundamental data can be used to develop intervention programs for middle-aged men that promote subjective well-being through different styles of coping with regret.

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