Older adults recall memories of life challenges: the role of sense of purpose in the life story

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Abstract

Late life is still often characterized as a time of loss and decline. The current study moved beyond this view, using both the resilience framework and the life story approach to highlight the rich life experiences of older adults. Doing so created an opportunity to explore perspectives on sense of purpose in life, from the vantage point of old age. The study had two central questions. That is, how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives, and what factors led to the development of a sense of purpose? Following guidelines for the consensual qualitative research method (CQR; Hill et al., *The Counseling Psychologist*, *25*(4), 517–572, 1997; Hill & Knox, 2021), in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 older women and men (aged 60 – 100 years) and transcribed for analysis. The CQR method revealed seven domains in the interviews. Three domains were relevant to the first research question, including: overcoming life challenges to pursue purpose, perspective-taking to maintain purpose, and purpose as part of one's religion. Four domains provided insights on the second research question: life background influencing purpose, shifts in purpose across life, fulfilling purpose across life, and obstacles to pursuing purpose in life. Findings highlighted how older people use sense of purpose as a guide in the face of life's inevitable challenges. They also revealed the unique life story paths that lead to the development of purpose across individuals' lifetimes. The implications of maintaining a sense of purpose in life, across the later years, are discussed.

Introduction

Viktor Frankl (1959) proposed that higher-order belief systems, including having a sense of purpose in life, allows people to endure even the most challenging hardships. Since Frankl's classic work, sense of purpose has been theorized to be an innate human need: "The human brain cannot sustain purposeless living. It was not designed for that" (Klinger, 1998, p. 33). A sense of purpose is defined as having "goals, intentions, and a sense of direction" in life (Ryff, 1989, p. 1071). It not only provides a sense of intentionality and directionality, but also leads to the pursuit of goals to fulfill a greater good (Damon et al., 2003). Sometimes conflated with meaning in life (Steger, 2009), purpose refers to an

externally oriented quest for an individual to fulfill inner motivations that are one's "why" for living and being in the world (Frankl, 1959). Meaning in life is not comprised of actively striving towards achieving tangible actions, goals, or behaviors that are in line with what one finds meaningful. Meaning in life, instead, encompasses larger life aspirations that may be used to organize and make sense of what one holds important in their worldview. Indeed, being driven by purpose in life entails some level of intentional engagement and effort that is directed towards some defined outcome (Damon et al., 2003).

Scholars have called for studying purpose through life story narratives to capture individuals' own unique views and stories of purpose (Wong, 2008). In the current study, we answer that call by deeply exploring older persons' sense of purpose through use of qualitative methods, specifically via the consensual qualitative research method (Hill & Knox, 2021).

Grounded in a resilience framework (Wiles et al., 2019), the current study highlights older adults' unique perspectives on their own aging process. Despite having faced life

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challenges, older adults can draw on their own *internal resources* to adapt with resilience (Taylor & Conger, 2017). *Successful aging* has traditionally focused on the avoidance of physical, social, and cognitive loss and decline (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). The resilience framework instead embraces the idea that difficult events and losses inevitably occur across a life but can be adapted to in myriad ways. That is, multiple resources can affect one's likelihood of experiencing resilience despite challenges. Internal resources refer to positive, personal attributes that help explain why some individuals adapt or thrive in the face of challenge (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Lifespan developmental theories have also described how internal resources can promote resilience in the second half of life (e.g., Selective Optimization and Compensation; Baltes & Baltes, 1990). Based on these theories, the current study explored older adults' sense of purpose in life as one such internal resource.

Qualitative studies of older adults' sense of purpose

Most previous research on purpose in late life has used quantitative methods. That work has yielded useful insights regarding older adults' well-being and the importance of purpose in human lives. For example, compared to older adults who report low purpose, older adults who report a high sense of purpose have lower levels of depressive symptoms (Windsor et al., 2015). During the COVID-19 pandemic, having a stronger sense of purpose in life was associated with lower levels of loneliness among older adults (Kim et al., 2021). Sense of purpose has also been shown to protect against cognitive decline in older adulthood (Kim et al., 2019). Qualitative methods can, however, add to this work by more deeply exploring the nuanced role of sense of purpose in individuals' lives. A small number of studies have used qualitative methods, often indirectly exploring older adults' sense of purpose but not as the main research endeavor.

One thematic analysis that focused on older adults' perceptions of health showed that some people described feeling needed by others, or maintaining independence, as providing them with a sense of purpose (Tkatch et al., 2017). Another study used data immersion analysis. Researchers coded in-depth interviews to understand the *resilience story* of each older adult (Browne-Yung et al., 2017). Some of these narratives included maintaining a sense of purpose to overcome adversity. That is, their stories of resilience focused on being engaged in their communities to develop new opportunities to pursue goals.

Another study used grounded theory analysis to explore relations between older women's spirituality and resilience (Manning, 2013). Older adults described using spirituality to navigate challenge: it provided an underlying sense of purpose that promoted well-being. Further, in a naturalistic inquiry study (Janssen et al., 2011), older adults felt that pursuing goal-directed, intentional behaviors (i.e., sense of purpose) helped them maintain mastery over their life situation. Finally, a recent study used grounded theory analysis to explore diverse older adults' goals and aspirations (Liao & DeLiema, 2021). Older adults mentioned the importance of making a difference (i.e., contributing to the greater good as a purpose).

Taken together, these previous qualitative studies, that focused either directly or implicitly on sense of purpose, inform the current work. They suggest that older adults' sense of purpose may indeed serve as an internal resource for resilient aging. The current study thus addressed that issue directly.

Benefits of the life story framework for studying sense of purpose

Storytelling has been deemed a critical mechanism through which humans make sense of life's experiences (Josselson, 2011). When interviews are guided by the life story framework (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001), people reflect on a significant life event, bringing it to mind from the vantage point of their current life. Through this reconstructive narrative recollection, people may realize greater personal integration, recounting life experiences in a way that reveals purpose in their life story (Josselson, 2011).

The Purpose in the Life Story Interview developed for the current study focused on eliciting rich information about the actual, unique challenges older adults have lived through. In contrast, particularly to quantitative self-report methods, this interview approach allows older adults to voice what they themselves feel is important about their experience (Janssen et al., 2011). In telling aspects of their life story, older adults have the opportunity to authentically share their sense of purpose as they see it having manifest during their life's events. The interview also provides the opportunity to weave together and unify memories of significant life events across the life story (McAdams, 2001). As such, using the life story framework was optimal for addressing the study's central research questions.

Central research questions

To implement consensual qualitative research (CQR; Hill et al., 1997), we crafted research questions that were open-ended enough to allow findings to truly emerge from the interviews. The goal was for the researchers to learn from the stories shared by these older participants (Hill & Knox, 2021). Two central questions generally guided the research. The first was to understand, how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives? The second was to explore, what factors led to the development of a sense of purpose?

Method

This study closely followed methodological guidelines for implementing CQR (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 1997, 2005, 2017). CQR garners a rich and detailed understanding of individuals' "inner experiences, attitudes, and beliefs" (Hill & Knox, 2021, p.3). It stays close to the explicit meaning of participants' statements and limits implicit interpretation of participants' thoughts (Hill et al., 1997). Consensus is a crucial aspect of the process and is what differentiates CQR from other qualitative methods. Consensus in this method "relies on mutual respect, equal involvement, and shared power" among team members who code the interview data (Hill et al., 1997, p. 523). Multiple perspectives across coding team members are recommended to most fully understand the interview data thereby approaching the participant's authentic story, or their truth (Hill et al., 1997). The diversity of opinions and worldviews of the coders, who nevertheless must come to consensus, may help reveal complexities and ambiguities in the data (Hill et al., 2005). Through semi-structured, open-ended interviews, consistent data is collected across participants that can also be individually examined (Hill et al., 2005). CQR further utilizes at least one auditor (i.e., someone who is not involved in coding the data) throughout the analytic process to ensure that the conclusions drawn are grounded in the data (i.e., trustworthy) and that the meaning of the data is fully agreed upon (i.e., consensus). This method is often utilized when there is limited research in a given area. In this case, the current study aimed to expand the small existing qualitative literature on older adults' sense of purpose in life.

Participants

Following guidelines for CQR sample sizes (Hill et al., 2005) as well as previous studies using CQR (e.g., Park et al., 2021), this study was comprised of 18 older adults. Participants lived in Florida or Georgia. This sample size allowed for an in-depth understanding of each case while simultaneously increasing likelihood of consistency in domains that arise across multiple cases (Hill & Knox, 2021). Older adults were recruited using flyers sent to organizations, places of worship, and individuals working with older adults. As is typical in gerontological research, participants were screened for dementia (Orientation-Memory-Concentration Test; Katzman et al., 1983) via an initial phone interview. One person was screened out on this basis. Participants received a $15 gift card for participating.

Nine older adults identified as female and nine identified as male. Ages ranged from 60 to 100 years ($M = 79.1$, $SD = 10.6$). Active recruitment efforts were made to ensure that the sample included people across late adulthood and not just participants who were 'young-old' (Lee et al., 2018) as focus on the young-old is typical in much gerontology research. Six (three women) were in the young-old group (ages 60–74 years), seven in the old-old group (75–84 years; two women), and five in the oldest-old group (85 years and above; four women).

Procedures

The study was approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board. Before electronically signing an informed consent form, participants were informed that identifying information would be kept confidential and were provided an overview of the research and interview process. Individual semi-structured interviews occurred by phone, lasted approximately 60–75 min, and were audio-recorded. Participants were then guided through the interview. The study aims were explained to all participants at the end of the session.

As part of the CQR process to further establish trustworthiness, the interview was first pilot tested on six individuals, including three older and three younger people. The pilot process served to familiarize the interviewer with the flow of the questions and to obtain feedback from pilot participants. This pilot process exceeded methodological recommendations that interviewers complete at least two pilot interviews with individuals from the population of interest (Hill et al., 2005). Each pilot participant provided feedback about the clarity of the interview questions, their feelings about doing the interview, and whether the amount of time was adequate for reflecting on the questions. Revisions were then made to the interview script which was then consistently used with actual study participants.

The purpose in the life story interview

The interview for this study was developed under the guidance of a faculty member who has extensive experience with qualitative analysis, including CQR, and the study auditor who has long-term experience with life story interviewing. The interview was created based on prior conceptualizations of purpose and resilience (i.e., Hill et al., 2015; Masten, 2001; Ryff, 1989) and based on the central research questions. That is, how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives, and what factors led to the development of purpose? Questions were developed based on the identified gaps in the literature on purpose in older adulthood (e.g., focusing on older adults' own definitions of purpose, whether they feel that they have one, how it developed over their lifetime). As the study was guided by the resilience framework, questions asking older adults to reflect on memories of major life challenges were included, followed by questions that asked about their own resilience.

The questions that asked about life challenges were strategically placed in the middle of the interview so that older adults would be able to discuss potentially lighter topics such as their feelings about purpose in life and also their resilience at the beginning and end, respectively. The interview further drew on the widely used life story framework for asking autobiographical interview questions (i.e., *life story interview*; McAdams, 2001) and followed recommended practices for qualitative interviewing and empathic communication with participants (Josselson, 2011). Older adults were asked eight scripted questions, following recommendations for conducting semi-structured interviews that last approximately one hour (Hill et al., 2005). Probes were used to elicit elaborations as necessary (e.g., "Can you share more about that?"). The full set of interview questions is included in Table 1.

To begin, each person was asked a pre-interview question to warm them up and allow them to begin thinking about sense of purpose at a general level. That is, they were asked about how they define what is meant by 'having a purpose in life'. All felt it was important to have a purpose, regardless of age. Older adults responded with a variety of views of what it means to have a sense of purpose in one's life. For example, some participants identified their own sense of purpose (e.g., being nice to others, 'moving the ball down the field' and, bringing others along). Others described what the word purpose means in general, including reference to having and fulfilling goals, purpose manifesting differently across life phases, or being related to religious beliefs. After

this pre-interview question, the standard interview questions were asked.

The role of the interviewer was to help uncover what the older person truly believes rather than to co-construct meaning with them (Hill et al., 2005). For example, older adults were not explicitly asked to recount their purpose when they shared memories of the two major challenging events from their lives. This allowed for coders to assess whether sense of purpose was relevant in older adults' own views of navigating life challenges. After sharing these memories, older adults were, however, asked whether they felt that their purpose guided them through challenging experiences. Older adults were also not explicitly asked about resilience until the final interview question. All older adults reported that they found the interview meaningful, recounted a variety of life experiences, and articulated gaining insights from exploring their life stories.

Consensual qualitative research—coding team

Before beginning the coding process, following CQR guidelines to establish trustworthiness and credibility, the coding team discussed their individual positionality and identities, assumptions/biases, and expectations regarding the study. The primary researcher was the sole interviewer of all participants to ensure consistency in interview style and also served as a member of the coding team (Hill & Knox, 2021). The interviewer identified as an Indian American woman, Hindu, and comes from a middle-class family of immigrants. At the time of coding, she was a doctoral student

Table 1 The purpose in the life story interview

Pre-Interview Question	How would you define what it means for people in general to have a sense of purpose?
Q1	People feel differently about the importance of having a sense of purpose. Not everyone has had one or feels it is even important to have one. Would you say that you have had some sort of sense of purpose in your life? Can you talk a bit about that?
Q2	Can you think back over your life and describe where your sense of purpose came from and what affected how it developed? Take a few moments to reflect on things or people over your lifetime that were important to developing your sense of purpose
Q3	So, can you first tell me about one particular major challenging life event that is particularly memorable in your life? It can be any kind of event or experience that you personally felt was challenging. This may be emotional to think about so please take as much time as needed
Q4	Can you tell me about one other major challenging life event that is memorable in your life story?
Q5	Thanks again for sharing these memories with me. You talked earlier about your sense of purpose. Would you say that your sense of purpose played any role during [Say what participant's challenging events were] either or both of these challenging events in your life? How would you describe that for each of these challenging events?
Q6	Can you describe whether or not you feel that you can cope, bounce back, or even learn as a result of challenges you face in your life today? And if so, what helps you to cope with the challenges you have faced in your life?
Q7	You've just been telling me about resilience. Given the current state of the world, how would you describe your resilience in the wake of COVID-19? What do you think is contributing or not contributing to it?
Q8	Okay, that completes the interview. I know I asked very specific questions today. Is there anything else you would like to share with me related to the topics we discussed today? Your sense of purpose, life challenges, or resilience?

Cues/prompts used in interview have been omitted for clarity of brevity

and is theoretically grounded in lifespan development from a humanistic psychology perspective. Beyond the interviewer, there were three other coders (i.e., for a total of four coding team members) who were undergraduate research assistants recruited for working on this project at the University of Florida. A second coder identified as a White woman from a well-educated family, Christian, and was an undergraduate health science major. A third coder identified as a White woman from a middle-class family, Christian, and aims to become a mental health counselor. The fourth coder identified as a gay cisgender man, comes from an upper middle-class family, Jewish but not religious, and will be attending graduate school in mental health counselling. The coding team ranged in age from 20 – 27 years. The auditor was a 61-year-old woman, a humanist and a psychology professor focused on life stories. To establish trustworthiness as per CQR, the auditor reviewed the domains, provided feedback to the coders throughout the coding process, and conducted cross-analyses with the coding team.

All coders received training in CQR through reading and discussing foundational articles (i.e., Hill et al., 1997, 2005, 2015). Three of the coders transcribed all interview audio recordings, noting nonverbal behaviors important to the narration (e.g., pauses, laughter). All coders were thus exposed to a majority of the cases through either interviewing or transcribing before the coding began. As important to the consensual nature of this process, this created the understanding among team members that no one team member had more information than the other coders about any given case. Further, as recommended by Hill et al. (2005), coders rotated the order of who spoke first in coding meetings to alleviate power dynamics of there being an 'expert leader' who others should follow.

Although some researcher bias is inevitable, it is recommended to discuss biases at length early on in order to minimize them, so they do not inadvertently affect data analysis (Hill et al., 2005). Biases are "personal issues that make it difficult for researchers to respond objectively to the data" (Hill et al., 1997, p. 539). The coding team discussed their potential individual and collective biases. After discussing these biases, coders then discussed strategies that could be used to bracket, or set aside, these biases. In terms of transparency about potential coder biases before they began, coders noted that they would need to avoid putting higher value on stories of older adults who seemed similar to themselves. Coders also acknowledged that they do not have the same life experience as older participants, including not completely being able to relate to participants' relations with their children (as none of the coders had children). The coders mentioned their expectation that the participants would be more conservative than them and expected some older people to show implicit biases (e.g., regarding race or gender) that might be difficult for the coders to hear. Finally,

coders expected that if the older persons had hearing or speaking impairments related to age, it might be difficult to comprehend them fully while listening to or reading the transcripts. The team carefully discussed each of these issues and strategies to minimize such biases affecting their coding. They were also encouraged to foster accountability with one another, identifying when someone was showing a bias during coding.

Consensual qualitative research—data analyses

Data analysis began after all interviews were conducted in order to minimize researcher bias, which can lead the researchers' own assumptions and expectations to affect the coding (Hill et al., 2005). The coding process closely followed rigorously established guidelines for CQR (Hill & Knox, 2021; Hill et al., 1997, 2005) and followed exemplar studies (e.g., Hill et al., 2017). Interviews were transcribed and de-identified for coding.

First, each coder independently read a subset of the interview transcripts (i.e., equally distributed among coders) to create a list of *domains* that emerged from the data. Domains are topic areas that are used to group data about similar topics. Coders then convened to discuss possible domains until a stable list was formed. This list of domains was consensually agreed upon by the full team. Then, coders worked in pairs and used this list of domains to code the data. Each coder in the pair independently reviewed a subset of transcripts and assigned each block of data (i.e., a phrase, multiple sentences related to the same topic, or *idea units*) in the participants' narratives to a domain. Idea units that did not fit into any domains were placed in the "other" domain. The "other" category was reviewed to determine whether new domains could be constructed given consistencies among "other" data. Each pair of coders resolved discrepancies and reached consensus in domain coding by discussion.

Once domain coding was complete, coders proceeded to the next step: identifying the *core ideas* to summarize the content in each domain for each transcript. Core ideas are clear, concise statements of what the participant has said (Hill et al., 1997). The core ideas must remain close to the participant's own narrative. All coders worked together on domained data from three interviews to construct core ideas. After coders reached consensus on what the core ideas were, and understood the process for creating them, each coder worked with a subset of transcripts to summarize interview data into core ideas for all domains. Coder pairs swapped their cored data for review and discrepancies were resolved through discussion in coder pairs.

Cross-analysis is the next step in the CQR process. The auditor reviewed the core ideas within domains and provided suggestions to ensure that the core ideas accurately

represented the data. Each coder then independently examined all core ideas for each domain *across* a subset of cases to determine how these core ideas clustered together into *categories*, and as needed, *subcategories*. Categories were derived bottom-up from the data, not based on preconceived theories. After coder discussion, revisions were made until all coders reached consensus regarding each of the categories and subcategories that should be used to best describe the data.

Finally, frequency labels were used to characterize how often each category applied across all cases (Hill et al., 2005). The *general* label refers to categories that emerged in all or all but one of the cases; *typical* refers to categories that emerged in more than half of the cases; and *variant* refers to categories that emerged in at least three cases. Following CQR recommendations, categories that applied to only one or two cases were removed as they were not descriptive of the sample. Core ideas in these infrequently occurring categories, however, were checked to see if they should be placed into other existing categories.

Results

Seven domains emerged from the 18 interviews. This is in line with recommendations for no more than 15 domains emerging during CQR (Hill & Knox, 2021). Table 2 provides a list of all domains and categories and the frequencies with which categories occurred across cases. Results from categories that were *general* (i.e., found in at least 17 cases) or *typical* frequency (i.e., found in 10–16 cases) are exemplified below, by domain. Variant categories are displayed in Table 2. Participants have been assigned letters to replace names (e.g., "J," "S") as we present interview quotes to illustrate findings. Disfluencies such as "ya' know," "um," were removed for readability. Ellipses indicate when words have been left out. The domains are presented below in relation to each research question beginning with domains related to the first question: how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives?

Domains: how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives?

Overcoming life challenges to pursue purpose

All older adults recollected and shared memories of two challenging events from their life story. In doing so, this domain of overcoming challenges emerged. Many shared how they navigated challenging events so as to continue to pursue their purpose. Through using their own strategies, older adults were able to redirect their efforts back towards

their purpose, despite life difficulties. Seeking support was a typical category in this domain, as illustrated below.

In terms of seeking support, W, a 90-year-old part-time employed White woman, described her purpose as wanting to help others, particularly through her nursing career. However, she had to overcome a challenging legal situation involving her sibling wanting to be guardian of their parents in a nursing home. For support in getting back to living out her purpose, she confided in her daughter and went to counseling:

> Well, my sense of purpose was that I was going to continue my nursing career. I was going to be involved in helping others but the situation with my sibling. Ah, very devastating through that period of time. My daughter was a tremendous help. I talked to her very frequently. . . .she was very stabilizing for me. And then after it all happened, I realized I was carrying a terrible level of anger, which is not something that I wanted to do. So, I ended up going to a counselor for a while and just discharging all that anger, which is a very big move.

Through garnering this social support, W was able to navigate the complex family situation with her sibling and parents. She felt she was gradually able to recognize her anger, let go of it, and thus regain her sense of purpose to dedicate herself to helping others.

A 62-year-old employed African woman, C, reflected on the challenges and barriers she faced as a new immigrant in America, including not having money or receiving support from her ex-husband who had brought her to the US. She vulnerably shared that she struggled with serious mental health challenges. Her mother provided her with support through this struggle so that she was able to obtain an education and pursue her long-term purpose to provide well for her children:

> And then my ex-husband picked me up and took me to where he was living. That was just, Oh my God. I thought every day, 'Why did I bring myself into this country.'. . . .My goal coming to America was to be a pharmacist. It didn't happen because the person that brought me here did not help me at all. I had to start working three jobs just to be able to get to where, it was hard. . . .My mother came. My mother came over here and she helped me tremendously. Taking care of the children so I would be able to go to school and helping me every way she can. That was my mom. . . .If she wasn't here, or she didn't come to America to stay with me, I wouldn't be where I am today. When I came here, I started working at Dunkin Donuts. Maybe I would still be working at Dunkin Donuts.

Table 2 Summary of domains, categories and subcategories (*N* = 18)

Domain	Category	Subcategories	Frequency
Overcoming Life Challenges to Pursue Purpose	Seeking support		*Typical (9)*
		Counseling	
		Friends/family	
	Keeping busy or active		Variant (4)
Perspective-Taking to Maintain Purpose	Perspective on challenges		*General (17)*
		Mindset of perseverance	
		Adaptability to situations	
		Comparing situation to others	
		Patience	
	Changes in perspective	Shifts in thought processes	*Typical (10)*
	Reflecting on one's past		Variant (5)
	Perspective on death and loss		Variant (4)
		Moving forward	
		Accepting as part of life	
Drawing on Purpose as Part of One's Religion	Religious support through challenges		*Typical (8)*
Life Background Influencing Purpose	Family influences and values		*Typical (16)*
		Importance of education	
		Helping others	
		Importance of family	
	Events during childhood		*Typical (14)*
		Loss of parent	
		Unsafe home environment	
		Changes in living situation	
	Work influences		Variant (4)
	Role models		Variant (3)
Domain	Category	Subcategory	Frequency
Fulfilling Purpose across Life	Helping others	Career	*Typical (10)*
		Family	
		Volunteer work	
	Pursuing one's goals		*Typical (10)*
	Meaningful activities		*Typical (9)*
	Nurturing relationships		Variant (3)
Shifts in Purpose across Life	Positive shifts of purpose		*Typical (13)*
		Profession	
		Family	
Obstacles to Pursuing Purpose in Life	Challenges in interpersonal relationships	Conflicts with family/partner	*Typical (9)*
	Finances and work-related challenges		*Typical (8)*
	Loss of a loved one		*Typical (7)*
	Health issues		Variant (5)
		Mental and/or physical health	
	Trouble taking perspective		Variant (4)

C described how being able to continue pursuing her purpose would have been impossible without her mother's support. She kept her mind focused on her purpose, to provide for her children, and described the social support she received from her mother as allowing her to do that, despite serious challenges.

Perspective-taking to maintain purpose

Although social support was important in staying focused on purpose despite challenge, 17 out of 18 older adults also shared how they maintained their purpose in a different way: through perspective-taking. These older adults described

how they were able to reappraise difficult life situations to continue pursing life with a sense of purpose. Two categories emerged as typical in this domain: perspective on challenges, and changes in perspective.

As an example of a useful perspective on challenge, L, a 72-year-old retired Black man described his mindset of perseverance in the face of difficulty. His purpose was to bring up his children correctly and teach them important life values. When he underwent knee surgery and subsequent rehabilitation, he felt that he was not able to devote the time needed to his family and instead had to focus on his own recovery. He described how his perspective on this challenge, what he saw as his innate perseverance and determination, helped him navigate this time:

> It has to be the DNA, in how resilient you are and how determined you are to pull through it. Because, sometimes if you sit there and think, 'Woe is me,' it does not help you with the problem. It won't help your mentality. It just makes you more feeling sorry for yourself, like, 'Oh God, why me? Why did this happen?' Yeah, go through some of that but not all of it. I don't dwell on it. I try to dwell on the positive aspect of it, 'I'm still alive. This happened but okay I'm still alive.' I can still see my wife. I can still see my children. I can still see my grandchildren. . . . It's in your DNA, that's what internal drive within you that you inherited from your parents, it's not something physical you can control, it's innate, it's within you.

L's perspective, that one must persevere and not dwell in self-pity, allowed him to stay focused on his purpose and to cherish the time he had with his wife and family.

D, a 67-year-old retired Puerto Rican woman who had been a teacher shared that her purpose was to shape her students into good, well-rounded people and to raise her own child to be a caring person. Undergoing life-changing health conditions could have stood in the way of her pursuing her purpose but it did not:

> And then realizing that I was handicapped totally changed my approach. I just knew I couldn't do things that I used to do and I was going to have to slow down. But at the same time, knowing that my stuff is nothing compared to what so many other people have. My sister has major health issues and I just feel like I shouldn't even say anything about mine because hers is much worse. So, it was a life changing event with me. But I have to put it in perspective too. My sense of purpose is, I just wanted to be nice. Why don't we all just love each other? Not being able to do [things] physically doesn't mean that I can't still be nice and appreciative – helpful if I can. Even though there are things I

can't do physically, it doesn't change how I can just be pleasant to other people and helpful in my own way.

D's narrative showed how she gained perspective on her health. She realized that her physical health was not as limiting as other's may face and that it did not need to stand in the way of pursuing her purpose of being helpful and nice to others.

As an example of a change in perspective, G, a 75-year-old retired White Canadian woman filed for bankruptcy later in life and felt like a victim. She shared how her perspective on this difficulty shifted once someone complimented her and pointed out her strength.

> And people tell me, a friend said, 'You're one of the strongest women I know.' And I thought, 'Oh, that's interesting.' And looking back, I can see why she said it. . . .so it was like, 'If I can do it, so can you.' And it's just by looking at your thinking. Back then, I was a victim, and I loved to tell you about it. I've done a lot of work on victimhood, and no longer, I can't be a victim anymore. And it was all a gift that got me where I am now. . . .Just looking at everything that happened as done *for* me, not *to* me…So that bankruptcy was done for me, got rid of all my debt. I got to play the victim for years. And I loved that. And now I love even better not being the victim.

Due to her shift in perspective on victimhood, G felt empowered to continue pursuing life with purpose. She described her purpose as adding peace to the world and supporting others undergoing stress, particularly by helping them reframe how things can happen "for them," not "to them."

Drawing on purpose as part of one's religion

Religious faith and beliefs also emerged as a domain: older adults described drawing on their faith as important to their sense of purpose. Some shared that they used their purpose, found through their faith, to navigate challenging life events. Others described their faith as a broader context that influenced their sense of purpose and how it manifested in their life. One typical category emerged: religious support through challenges.

Religious support guided C through a challenging time. She was going through a divorce and reflected on how prayer helped her during this time.:

> A lot of prayer. And I always tell my daughter I always pray. I get up in the morning, you pray for your family, pray for you, pray for everything. You have to. A lot of prayer. You have to put God first.

She described how her faith has served her well throughout her life and especially through life challenges. She emphasized how passing on her faith and positive values to her children is part of her purpose.

N, a 91-year-old White woman described that her belief in God allowed her to pursue her purpose, being a support for others, even when she herself was undergoing a challenging time when her spouse was affected by alcoholism:

> I think maybe the reason I was able to do a lot is because I believe in God, and I feel really – he's looking after me and saying it's gonna get better, or he just gave me what it took to just handle things like that…. Going back to my belief in the Lord, I know he's there to protect me and help me through things.

She reflected on feeling that she received protection through a higher power and was thus guided through this challenging time.

In sum, these three domains, overcoming life challenges to pursue purpose, perspective-taking to maintain purpose, drawing on purpose as part of one's religion, all provided context for understanding the first research question, how have older adults drawn on their sense of purpose across their lives? Presented below, the next set of domains were related to the second research question: what factors led to the development of purpose?

Domains: what factors led to the development of purpose?

Life background influencing purpose

Many older adults described how their early life experiences (i.e., up to young adulthood) influenced the development of their purpose. Their life background shaped how their purpose manifested and specific ways in which they began to pursue it during their earlier life. Two typical categories emerged: family influences and values and events during childhood.

In terms of family influences, J, a 70-year-old retired White woman, reflected on how her purpose, to focus on her family and treat others well, stemmed from her upbringing:

> My dad instilled more of a purpose of family. That you need to have a close family. And I think that's where it all started…I think one of the main things that has been a common thread, that has been throughout my life, is to treat other people the way you would want to be treated. . . .Growing up, I mean, it was just like the golden rule and that's it. That was how you lived your life. It's just how you would want to be treated. And that is what I have tried – to keep that main goal

throughout my life, is to treat other people as I would want to be treated.

She described how her purpose was directly related to the values that her father passed down to her while she was growing up. Moreover, her purpose continues to be informed by these early life values today.

Similarly, B, a 65-year-old employed White man, shared how his purpose, to help others, was shaped by the values his parents passed on to him:

> Feeling a sense of helping people has been my primary sense, or primary feeling, of purpose. I realized that it is because of who I am and the way that I was raised. That, and I've always communicated to my delightful children as well that, if you see something that you can help somebody out with, then do it. I guess my father and my mother taught me that. That, just don't sit around and watch somebody do something.

B reflected on the way that he was raised and connected the set of ideals he holds to this day to what his parents taught him early on his life. He has continued to draw on these values as part of his purpose as he has passed them on to his own children.

L also mentioned his parents, particularly describing how his mother influenced his sense of purpose, to care for others:

> My parents were definitely an influence, like I said my mother even more so. In Africa, you know, she'd been associated with a lot of people. She helped raise so many kids that were not necessarily her own. . . there were always aunts and uncles. So, you grew up with that sense of relationship and value because it's not just about you. That African saying, 'it takes a village' is indeed true. It takes more than one person, your relation, biologically or not, it still takes. You pick up lots of values and things from other people. But yeah, [my mother] for me is what prompted all this in my beliefs and values.

L recollected that his mother helped raise many kids in Africa and how this shaped his own views. His cultural background, exemplified through his mother's values and actions, influenced him to take on the purpose of having care and concern for others' well-being.

Among these participants, there was a clear sense that their upbringing strongly influenced the development of their own purpose. These early life experiences and values continued to shape how these participants live their lives, and live their purpose, today. Some older adults reflected, however, on how negative aspects of their background, events during their youth, influenced the development of their purpose.

For example, H, an 85-year-old retired White woman, shared how growing up in an oppressive environment initially suppressed her ability to develop her own purpose:

> My life, unfortunately because I was a female, was very limited. I wasn't allowed to go to college, and I wasn't allowed to drive a car just because I was a girl. It was a very oppressive environment and so I didn't have that opportunity. . . .I was told I had to get married and have children, which I did do. But there's more to life than being married and having children.

H struggled to survive during her early years and felt that she did not have a purpose. She held a vision though of how having an ideal early family context could have fostered a sense of purpose—one that "encouraged you to know about yourself and to be educated."

D described how her childhood experiences gave her the purpose of raising her own children "to be nice to people and to just think":

> I was afraid of [my father] physically until I moved down to college. I loved him, but I was afraid of him. He would get out the belt and we got spanked until black and blue. And my mother never did anything. As a mother, when I became a mother, I thought, 'There is no way I would let anybody lay a hand on my child.'. . . .Looking at how I was raised definitely influenced how I raised my child. My parents really did not understand how these different things affected me.

D's sense of purpose was shaped by her fear of her father and fear of aggression. She felt her purpose was to raise her own child to be a helpful, compassionate person.

Fulfilling purpose across life

Many participants described how striving to fulfill their purpose was a guide for them in life. They recalled how actively pursuing life goals allowed their purpose to develop. Particularly, they recounted memories of how they had, over time, lived their purpose. Three categories emerged: helping others, meaningful activities, pursuing one's goals.

D described how she fulfilled her purpose, to help others and instill good values in others, through her roles both as a teacher and then as a parent:

> When I was teaching, I really wanted to make my students good people who are well rounded. I always told them, 'I don't care how smart you are. If you're not nice, people aren't gonna want to be around you.' And then after I had my child, I had another purpose. I had seen too many kids that didn't care about other people and they were just adamant about, 'Me, me, me.' I didn't want a child like that. I wanted a nice person.

D shared how actively helping others, through her career in teaching, allowed her to fully develop a sense of purpose. She was able to live out her purpose through creating opportunities for her students and her own child to become good, well-rounded people.

L reflected on how helping others, especially children with a similar life story to his own, is important to him. He shared how his activities fulfill this purpose:

> I coach soccer and provide what you call a scholarship for disadvantaged kids. I like that purpose of helping other kids, especially immigrant kids. Cause I was raised in England, moved there from Africa when I was eight, so I understand some of the obstacles that they are going through because I've experienced it myself.

L describes how he developed his sense of purpose through helping others, in his case, coaching and providing scholarships. His own early life experiences acted as a guide for him to develop purposeful activities later in life such as helping disadvantaged children.

Some participants described how pursuing meaningful activities was a way in which their purpose developed and was fulfilled over time and continues to be fulfilled in their current age. For example, W shared that engaging in learning has always been an important purpose she has pursued in her life:

> I finally retired from it just after 11 years and was hired by [a college] to build a lifelong learning program. . . . I believe in lifelong learning, don't stop…The very worst fear I have of aging is becoming irrelevant. So, I work very hard at staying relevant to what's going on in the world. Being up to date as I can on technology and staying current with the different changes in lifestyles…to learn about that, adjust to that, and being open to it. There's a whole new culture out there to learn about and be part of. I try to be relevant. That's the goal, is to be relevant.

After retiring from a career in nursing, W pursued a master's specialty in psychiatric nursing and then enrolled in school again for counselor education. She reflected on how lifelong learning continues to be an important purpose for her and she strives to engage in learning even today.

Shifts in purpose across life

As older adults shared about how their purpose had developed and how they fulfilled it, many mentioned that shifts had occurred in their purpose over their lifetime. Through various life experiences, including with their career and family, many found positive changes occurring in regard to how they lived their purpose. Others also described

how their growth across different life domains realigned their purpose. One category emerged: positive shifts of purpose.

R, a 92-year-old unemployed White man, described how he experienced a positive shift toward greater purpose through his own aging process:

> As I got older, I like to help people, because I know that I don't need help. And that has become, as I think of it, a new purpose and that's a good thing. . . as I have gotten older, I have taken a more intimate interest in people's welfare. And I like to learn about people's lives and what interests them and what do they like and what are they afraid of. So, I would say that has become my new purpose. And maybe the purpose that I have had. I'm glad, it's obviously come at the end of things, but glad that it came.

He felt that his purpose meaningfully evolved in later life phases. Whereas his purpose was previously to focus on effectively fulfilling whatever role he was in (e.g., being a father), he was happy to have now found a new purpose at his current age.

E, an 82-year-old retired White man, described his purpose as striving to continuously grow in life and to bring along others with him in that growth. After two years in the Army, his parents expected him to return to work in the family business. He rejected this idea as it would not help fulfil his purpose, seeking self-growth. After obtaining a different job, however, he still did not feel a sense of growth. He described how eventually going back to school was a shift in how he pursued his purpose and helped him build an opportunity-focused mindset.

> When I went to [prestigious US University], I said 'this is your job now and you're gonna do your best to make a successful'. . . The main cause, I think, was I did have that attitude, I really worked hard. And had good results, fortunately. But it was a totally different experience from undergrad. It was just getting the most out of this opportunity that I had. . .When you sense that there's an opportunity there or something isn't right, you fix it.

E reflected on how a positive shift in purpose he experienced in his earlier life helped him work hard and fulfill this new purpose, especially after he was feeling stuck in his previous career.

Obstacles to pursuing purpose in life

Feeling a sense of purpose was described as beneficial by most older adults. They also, however, noted that the pursuit of purpose was not always easy. Many reflected on how experiencing both positive and negative life challenges created obstacles to pursuing their purpose. Three categories emerged as typical: challenges in interpersonal relationships, finances and work-related challenges, and loss of a loved one.

N, a 91-year-old White woman, described how her purpose, to help other people, was dampened by limits in her ability to socialize due to her early relationship with her parents. She described clashes with her father due to cultural values he held from his own country of origin and was restrained in her ability to interact with other people:

> I started off being very bashful in life. . . growing up the way I did because my father was an Italian boy. In Italy, it was just a different kind of life growing up than it would have been otherwise. Just living with a person who was not American and didn't know how, live like how we do normally. I just felt differently, and I was not doing the things that the other kids did. There wasn't anything I was permitted to do. . . Dating was something I had to wait to do until I was a certain age. And doing things that they would do, go off to the beach, just many things that I was not permitted to do like the other children. I was very disappointed and not happy with the situation but of course I had no choice. . . For so long, I didn't have the opportunities to do things.

N recalled how experiences made it difficult for her to explore ways in which she could help others, thereby limiting pursuit of her purpose.

M, a 72-year-old part-time employed White male, described how a work-related challenge, experiencing ageism, was an obstacle to him fulfilling his purpose:

> Because of paying for education in my 60s and 70s, it became very difficult to get a job because I was still paying debt on student loans for the girls and supporting myself. And I ran into a situation where nobody hires anybody if you're 60 or 70, although that fortunately is changing a little bit. . . .If I didn't [keep trying], I couldn't pay the debt that I had and the girls would inherit whatever debt I had.

M described how his age was held against him when he was trying to obtain a job. However, he kept trying because of his purpose, which was his desire to be a positive contributor to society and to support his children.

Discussion

Many older Americans continue to live an active, stimulating life well beyond middle age (Carstensen, 2009; Guiney et al., 2020), indeed demonstrating resilience despite late life challenges (Wiles et al., 2019). The current study

sidesteps the traditional view of aging as navigating loss and decline (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Instead, we used a person-centered approach that allowed older adults to reflect on their own life story, while revealing their sense of purpose. The interview provided participants an opportunity to define purpose for themselves (i.e., as compared to questionnaires with pre-defined items about purpose). For example, many older adults expressed purpose involving an other-oriented component, corresponding to Damon et al. (2003) conceptualization of purpose as comprised of a beyond-the-self dimension. Others, however, described purpose as being self-oriented and personally meaningful, in line with Ryff's (1989) Purpose in Life subscale of the Psychological Well-Being Scale as well as the Life Engagement Test designed to measure purpose in life (Scheier et al., 2006). As such, the consensual qualitative research method used for exploring older adults' interviews revealed consistencies with past literature but also yielded novel insights. Older persons' interpretations of life, from their current vantage point in old age, provided a nuanced view of their sense of purpose. Findings are discussed in relation to our two research questions.

Drawing on sense of purpose across life

Many older adults described disruptions to mental health from life challenges (e.g., serious illness) that undermined assumptions about themselves and their world (Poulin & Silver, 2019). They often, however, recalled these challenges through the lens of a sense of purpose. This reflection can be seen as a type of *autobiographical reasoning* that allows integration of difficult events into one's life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) and serves as an internal resource for resilience. Through integrating memories of past challenges in terms of the common thread of their sense of purpose, older adults appeared to have gained insights and self-acceptance.

One way in which this occurred is that these older adults often described feeling a shift in their perspective in the face of challenge. This shift allowed them to adapt to their new reality and regain their sense of purpose to show resilience despite challenges. They were able to not just accommodate to a negative event but also had used the challenge to further manifest an existing, or forge a new, sense of purpose. For example, one older woman said that she floundered when her sibling died. Death and loss can certainly disrupt one's sense that life has order (Mroz et al., 2019). This older woman, however, reforged her perspective and reshaped how her purpose manifested: she spent more time caring for her aging mother, thereby renewing her stated purpose of always wanting to care for others. Indeed, older adults report feeling more personal

growth when recalling memories of loss events as compared to other life challenges or neutral life events (Mroz et al., 2019). The nature of loss may prompt older adults to reevaluate their values and goals in life, and as such, this may drive some to reconnect with opportunities to strive towards their sense of purpose.

Most older adults in the current study provided narratives that showed they were able to regulate emotion even when navigating serious challenges (i.e., self-regulatory skills; Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). They were thus able to maintain or return to homeostasis (Cornwell et al., 2021). They described how this allowed them to allocate efforts toward new activities and thereby eventually regain their sense of purpose. Self-regulatory skills may allow older adults to feel greater self-control in a longer-term context, which may in turn foster a greater striving for purpose. Despite experiencing challenges, older adults in this study were able to self-regulate through assessing their situation (i.e., defining what it was they wanted to accomplish) and then altering their behaviors towards intentional efforts in line with fulfilling their purpose (i.e., locomotion; Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). Indeed, previous research has indicated that this locomotion towards one's goals is associated with a greater sense of purpose and higher life satisfaction, moreso than simply assessing and considering the right goals to pursue and the ways to do so (Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis et al., 2017). It should be acknowledged, however, that some older adults may lose their sense of purpose at some point in life. This could be highly distressing as they reflect on their life story and attempt to find acceptance. In the current study, however, older adults did not describe having this experience.

Older adults also narrated drawing on a sense of purpose across their lives by engaging in intentional, consistent efforts to maintain their purpose when it was disrupted. In these cases, older adults drew on their *existing* purpose to help navigate a challenge. For example, one older adult recalled how he continued to pursue his purpose (i.e., staying focused on personal growth) and that this guided him through a challenging period. Sense of purpose has been defined as involving consistent and intentional pursuit of one's goals (Damon et al., 2003). In line with that definition, many older adults described that having a sense of purpose involves consistently maintaining direction and progressing across one's life. This intentional focus on living out one's purpose may be seen as a form of resilient aging. That is, many older adults' narratives described how they viewed life obstacles as barriers, but as barriers that could be overcome while staying true to one's existing purpose. In this way, older adults positioned themselves as agentic as they reflected on difficult periods in their life stories (McAdams, 2013). This interpretation is consistent

with previous qualitative research on the oldest-old (Wiles et al., 2019) that showed narrative repositioning is a strategy for managing challenge.

Indeed, being guided by purpose when negative life events occur is linked with positive outcomes such as better psychological adjustment (Park, 2010) and lower likelihood of loneliness (Kang et al., 2021). Older adults with a strong sense of purpose have intentional goals that provide direction in their life and that align with their personal values. Through feeling purpose and having a clear sense of the actions necessary to progress towards those goals, older adults may be more likely to engage in health-protective behaviors (e.g., including fostering both physical and mental health) that extend from broader lifestyle choices to daily health habits. For example, older adults with higher purpose in life are more likely to have high social support and better health (Musich et al., 2018). Even when negative life events do occur, feeling higher purpose in life is related to better emotional recovery from negative stimuli (Schaefer et al., 2013). For older adults in particular, feeling a sense of purpose may allow for greater cognitive reappraisal of negative life events and may help older adults avoid ruminative thinking (Schaefer et al., 2013). As such, purpose can act as a resource to support adaptation to life challenges and counteract feelings of loneliness even when coping with such events.

Factors contributing to development of sense of purpose

How and when people develop a purpose in life varies with life events and situations (Mitchell & Helson, 2016). One factor that contributed to development of purpose for older adults in the current study was experiencing particular life-phase specific events (e.g., changes in vocation, retirement, age-related health problems). Older adults' narratives revealed how these life events led to shifts in the development of their sense of purpose. For example, one older man recalled how his sense of purpose changed due to the diverse vocations he pursued across his life and particularly experienced change in during older adulthood. Older adults' recollections of particular life events being catalysts for reshaping their sense of purpose, is in line with previous research that also describes purpose as dynamic (Pfund & Lewis, 2020) not fixed (e.g., trait personality, McCrae & Costa, 2008).

Another theme for older adults in the current study was that their early life had an important influence on how they first gained a sense of purpose that then further developed across their lives. Specifically, several people shared how negative experiences, such as growing up in abusive or oppressive households or experiencing the early loss of a parent, made it difficult for them to develop any sense of

purpose. Individuals who experience highly stressful challenges early in life are less likely to actively explore different life goals and directions, compared to those who experience a strong, positive emotional foundation (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Many older adults who experienced adversity early in life, however, also reflected on how they were able to find a purpose and pursue it once they were able to remove themselves from the situation, either through time (i.e., years passing) or physical distance (i.e., moving away).

Many older adults in the current study recalled how others in their life positively contributed to the development of their purpose. Older adults reflected on how the behavior and religious ideologies of their parents, grandparents, and other role models contributed to their own purpose. This purpose was often characterized as a sense of responsibility for others. That is, these older adults wanted to contribute to others' wellbeing, modeling important others' behaviors. In sum, older adults in this study revealed several important factors that led to the development of their purpose. These included experiencing life phase specific events and shifts and considering the impact of early life influences and important others. As part of older adults' dynamic and continuously evolving life story, drawing on one's sense of purpose when narrating life challenges may allow for a sense of temporal continuity between the past and ones' current life that may help guide and ground them in their current life (Lind et al., 2021).

Maintaining purpose in older adulthood

When asked to look back on their lives, many older adults in the current study freely connected to how purpose manifests in their life today. For more than half of these older adults, their sense of purpose was to continue contributing to the welfare and well-being of others. This confers with qualitative research showing that, even later in life, individuals describe *making a difference* as an important element of their future aspirations (Liao & DeLiema, 2021). This contrasts with a common stereotype of older adults: that they lose their sense of purpose, particularly post-retirement (Karasawa et al., 2011). For some, loss of purpose may indeed be a concern. For example, a recent qualitative analysis of retirement community residents showed almost half expressed that having a purpose in life is not applicable to older adults. Purpose in later life was viewed as limited by health and the imminence of death (Lewis et al., 2020). Although aging is sometimes characterized by loss and decline, the variability in older adults' experiences in late life must continue to be recognized as well as their potential for resilient aging (Kim et al., 2021). Indeed, maintaining purpose in late life may be a way that some older adults adapt to unique challenges of aging with resilience. Older adults in the current study described having lived with purpose in previous life phases

but also staying engaged and active in pursuing purpose today (see also, Morton et al., 2018).

Limitations

Interviews were conducted over the phone which may be considered a limitation as it can distance the participant from the researcher. It may, however, also promote feelings of privacy that encourage more open expression (Hill et al., 2005). Another potential limitation is that participants entered the interview without knowing the specific questions they would be asked. This approach was used to encourage participants to provide authentic responses instead of practicing or editing their thoughts ahead of time. Regarding sample limitations, though the sample was strong in terms of gender balance and a large age range across late life, only about a third were people of color and most identified as middle class or higher. Findings should be considered with this sample composition in mind. Finally, coders used strategies to minimize personal biases. However, as in all qualitative research, we acknowledge that personal biases may have played a role during coding.

Conclusion

This study provided an in-depth, qualitative examination of older adults' sense of purpose as manifest in their life stories. Findings demonstrate the benefits of exploring older adults' actual, lived challenges, and uncovering their unique thoughts on how purpose has developed in their lives. Engaging in this qualitative exploration shed a positive light on aging, in contrast to societal stereotypes. That is, older adults showed resilience when reflecting on life's challenges. They were guided by their sense of purpose to engage in autobiographical reasoning and weave together memories of negative life events into a cohesive life story. Purpose can be seen not only as a resource for adapting to challenges, but as a necessary thread that allows for the transition between different chapters of one's life story (Thomsen et al., 2011). In cases where older adults are at risk of losing that thread, support may be gained through therapeutic reminiscence (Westerhof et al., 2010) that guides older adults to access higher-order belief systems such as a sense of purpose in life (Frankl, 1959). Overall, through life reflection and adaptive use of personal memory, sense of purpose particularly played an influential role in how older adults reflected on and reasoned through challenges. As one participant said, "I think all of us have purpose in life. I believe everybody has a reason to be here."

Data availability The dataset generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the private and sensitive nature of the individual interviews conducted with participants but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest statement On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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