

Received: July 29, 2023

Accepted: September 22, 2023

<http://dergipark.org.tr/rep>

*Research Article*

e-ISSN: 2602-3733

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September 2023 ♦ 7(2) ♦ 218-234

<https://doi.org/10.54535/rep.1334520>

## Studies about Individual Life Structure: A Meta-Synthesis

### Study

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#### Abstract

Adulthood period, which forms the most satisfying and wearing years of life psychologically, has been defined by many theorists. One of these theorists is Levinson, who developed the theory of Life Structure. There is a need for investigating the studies about life structure in a developmental process from a holistic and systematic point of view in order to learn what the studies about life structure enhance in adult individuals' life. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to investigate how adult people's life structures are shaped in the transition periods and the factors that affect their career developments in the qualitative studies about life structure. This study that is qualitative in nature is based on meta-synthesis approach. The data used in the study were composed of 12 qualitative studies selected using criterion sampling method. Based on the research in academic databases, the data were subjected to thematic content analysis methods in order to obtain common themes from the findings of the primary qualitative studies. The results of this study revealed four sub-themes and eight categories related to the themes of transition periods and career development. Results of the studies indicated that adult people experienced changes in their sense of self and life goals in a transition period they were in. Adult people who are in a transition period are determined to give a special place to their hobbies while they are shaping their life structures. Finally, factors affecting success in adult individuals' career development were found to be mainly intrinsic motivation and a mentor.

#### Key Words

Individual life structure • Meta-synthesis • Transition period • Career development

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**Citation:** Aktu, Y. (2023). Studies about individual life structure: A meta-synthesis study. *Research on Education and Psychology (REP)*, 7(2), 218-234.

With the increase in the life expectancy worldwide (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2016), the interest shown to childhood years seems to increasingly move to the adulthood periods. Researchers in the fields of psychology and education are currently seeking answers to questions about how individuals deal with the challenges they experience in adulthood, the changes that occur in career development over the years, how life goals evolve in adulthood, and the factors that shape adults' lives. This necessitates a greater focus on the phases that adult individuals go through. It is reported that there are various tasks that need to be achieved in the adulthood period, which is addressed in the framework of lifelong development approach (Bühler, 1969; Erikson, 1984; Gould, 2002; Havinghurst, 1972). Levinson is one of the theorists who attempted to provide a different point of view regarding what these tasks are and how they are accomplished. Levinson's Individual Life Structure theory distinguishes itself in several ways from the theories of Bühler, Gould and Erikson that explain adulthood. These aspects include, as seen in relatively collectivist cultures, highlighting how adult individuals change rather than how they develop and involving structure-building and structure-changing tasks to be accomplished (Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Levinson, 1986, 1996).

Life structure could be defined as the sum of individuals' self-representation and the relationships with the outer world other than self. Self-representation involves personal hopes, needs, value judgements and goals, as well as the meanings attributed to them. As for the outer world, it encompasses social processes such as family, work, friend relationships, religion, and responsibilities (Levinson, 1986, 1996). According to Levinson (1977, 1978, 1996), individual life structure is composed of a pattern that fulfils structure-building and structure-changing tasks. Settling down and transition periods are reported to follow each other respectively in the early, middle and late adulthood periods. While structure-building task is realized in the settling down periods, structure-changing tasks are realized in the transition periods. An adult person who builds a structure in the settling down period tries to put his/her hopes, self-worth, work and family life, and social roles within this structure. As for the transition phase, the individual reviews this existing structure and questions goals, social relationships and self-representation (Levinson, 1986, 1996). This provides the opportunity to make choices that will impact one's life in the subsequent period.

Early studies on life structure were found to test Levinson's theory developed based on his first studies (1977/1986) conducted with males in the middle adulthood period (Carpenter, 1992; Kopelman & Glass, 1979; Rolland, 1987; Smart & Peterson, 1994; Wolfe, O'Connor, & Crary, 1990). Levinson put the final form of this theory with his last studies conducted with women in the early adulthood period (1990/1996). With this period, studies on life structure (Huang, 2013; Gordon et al., 2002; Minter & Samuels, 1998; Rickards, 2005; Smithson, 2011; Stumpf, 2012) seemed to focus on the psychological changes in the early and middle transition phases of adulthood. The literature involves studies on life structure in different genders (Dyke & Murphy, 2006; Robinson & Smith, 2010), various age groups (Baatjies, 2015; Gordon et al., 2002; Sheridan, 2013) and various cultures (Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Yıldırım-Saatçı & Arıkan, 2014). In addition to these studies, it also includes studies related to various features such as leisure activities, life goals, religious life, social responsibilities, career development, and developmental crises (Carpenter & Patterson, 2004; Fouché et al., 2017; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Green, 2006; Larson, 2014; Smithson, 2011; Young, 2013). Frequency of these studies seems to increase after 2000, when there was an increase in the interest shown to Levinson's theory (Johnson, 2023). It is worth noting that there was an attempt to change the participant features and to investigate different issues related to life structure in these studies.

As it can be seen in the studies summarized earlier, studies about Levinson's life structure theory emerged in line with a developmental process. There is a limited number of studies that reviewed the studies on life structure (Aktu, 2016; Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Fouché et al., 2017; Smithson, 2011). On the other hand, review of the related literature indicates that no meta-synthesis studies on the phenomenon of life structure revealing adulthood in the framework of lifelong development approach. There is a need for investigating what life structure enhances in adult life from a holistic and systematic point of view. In this regard, this meta-synthesis study aims to fill this gap in the literature. It also aims to provide a guide for adults about the things to be given importance in the process of career development. In addition, it is expected to provide a concrete guide for experts in the field of psychology, in helping adult individuals to cope with developmental crises they might experience.

In line with the conclusions and recommendations of the studies in literature, the purpose of this study is to investigate the way adult individuals' life structures are shaped in transition periods and the factors that affect their career development in the qualitative studies about individual life structure. In line with this purpose, the study aims to demonstrate a common point of view. The sub-problems of the study are as follows:

1. How are life structures shaped in individuals' transition periods in the studies about individual life structure?
2. What are the factors that affect adult individuals' career development in the studies about individual life structure?

## Method

### Research Design

This study aims to obtain theoretical propositions by synthesizing findings of the studies about individual life structure. In line with this purpose, the study utilised a meta-synthesis approach that used qualitative design. Meta-synthesis is a qualitative comparison of the qualitative studies on a specific topic or phenomenon with their similar and different aspects (Çalık, & Sözbilir, 2014). Glesne (2013) emphasizes that meta-synthesis studies should identify the patterns among the studies from a holistic point of view and reach common themes. Hence, the present study utilised thematic content analysis method using the findings of the primary studies about life structure.

### Data Sources

The sample of this study was selected using criterion sampling method, one of the approaches employed in qualitative research design. While purposive sampling involves researchers selecting rich information sources aligned with the study's purpose for in-depth analysis, criterion sampling is defined as adhering to a predetermined set of criteria (Büyükoztürk et al., 2016). In this study, the included studies were classified based on six criteria. Studies eligible for inclusion met criteria such as focusing on adult individuals, investigating individual life structure, being accessible in full text, being either a research article or thesis, and employing qualitative research methods. The exclusion criteria for the study were that the life structure was not the focus, it was not accessible in the database, and it was a review article.

Totally 12 studies were included in this study. Identification of the sample size was performed considering the focus of the study, amount of the data, and theoretical sampling criteria (Cropley, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Accordingly, without losing the focus of the study, the purpose was to collect data at a maximum level until data saturation was achieved. Table 1 demonstrates the distribution of the number of participants, study designs, participants' features, data collection tools and data analysis methods in the studies mentioned.

Table 1

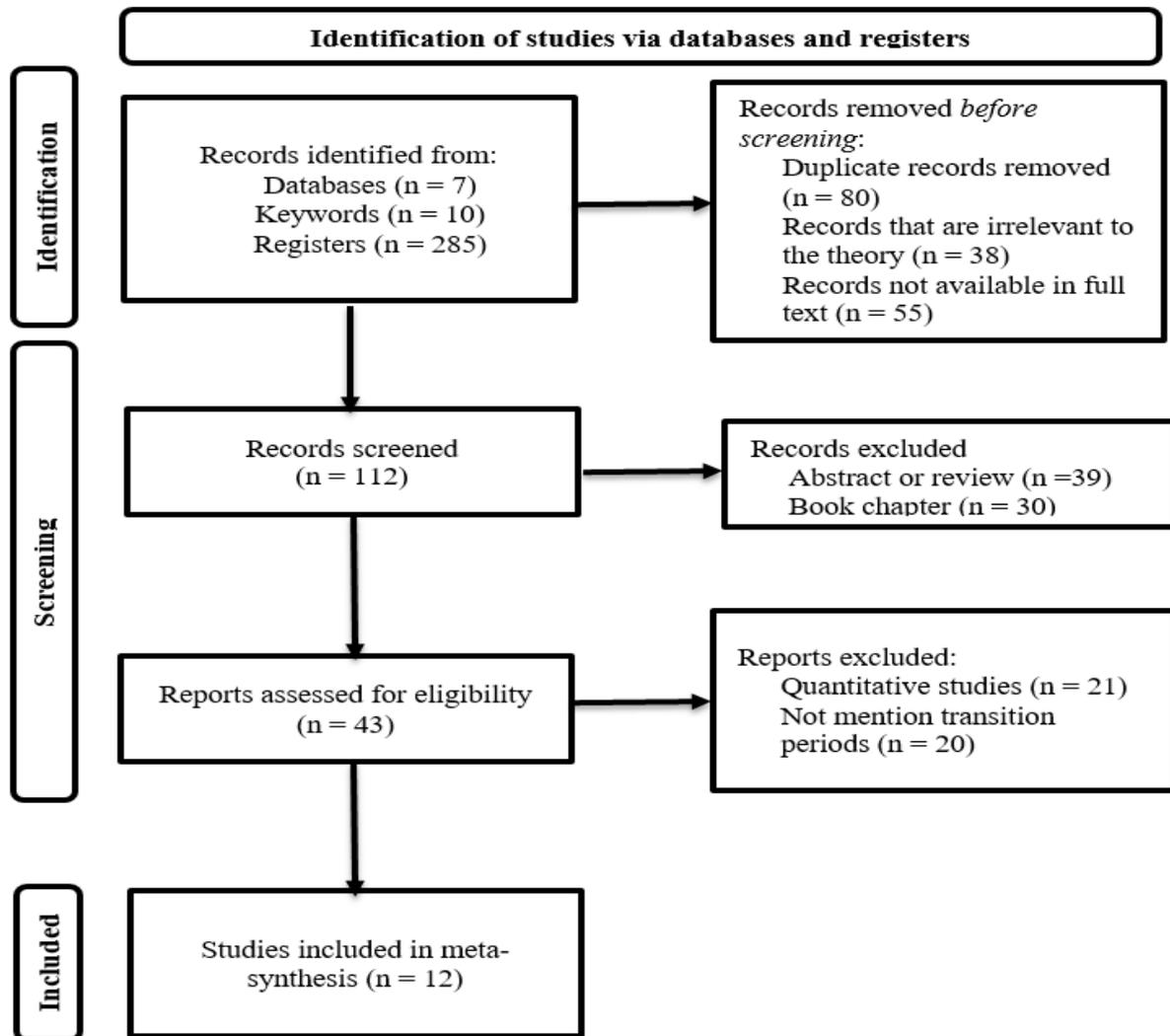
*Distribution of the studies included in the meta-synthesis according to various features*

Code	Study	Number of Participants	Research Design	Data Collection Tools	Data Analysis Method
M1	Aktu & İlhan (2017)	12 females and 16 males	Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Inductive content analysis
T1	Baatjies (2015)	1 female	Psychobiographical Case Study	Interview Form Visual and written documents	Content analysis
M2	Dyke & Murphy (2006)	20 females and 20 males	Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Thematic analysis
M3	Fouché et al. (2017)	1 male	Psychobiographical Case Study	Visual and written documents	Descriptive analysis
M4	Gersick & Kram (2002)	10 females	Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Thematic analysis
M5	Gordon et al. (2002)	36 females	Case Study	Interview Form	Content analysis
T2	Green (2006)	1 female	Psychobiographical Case Study	Visual and written documents	Content analysis
T3	Larson (2014)	1 male	Psychobiographical Case Study	Visual and written documents	Descriptive analysis
M6	Robinson & Smith (2010)	3 females and 3 males	Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Inductive content analysis
T4	Sheridan (2013)	2 females and males	4Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Thematic analysis
M7	Yıldırım-Saatçı & Arıkan (2014)	11 females	Case Study	Interview Form	Content analysis
T5	Young (2013)	3 males	Phenomenology	Semi-structured Interview Form	Inductive content analysis

As summarized in Table 1, seven of the included studies were articles, while the remaining five were theses. Regarding study designs, six studies utilized Phenomenology and case study approaches, with four of the case studies employing the psychobiographical approach. All the studies were found to have selected participants at adulthood period. An analysis in terms of the interview results showed that nine studies used interview forms, and six of them used semi-structured interview forms. In addition, a number of studies utilised visual and written documents (n = 4). Concerning data analysis methods, seven studies used content analysis, two studies used descriptive analysis, and three studies used thematic analysis.

## Procedure

The studies included in the meta-synthesis were identified using a five-stage method. Fig. 1 displays a detailed description in relation to the selection process of the studies included in the study.



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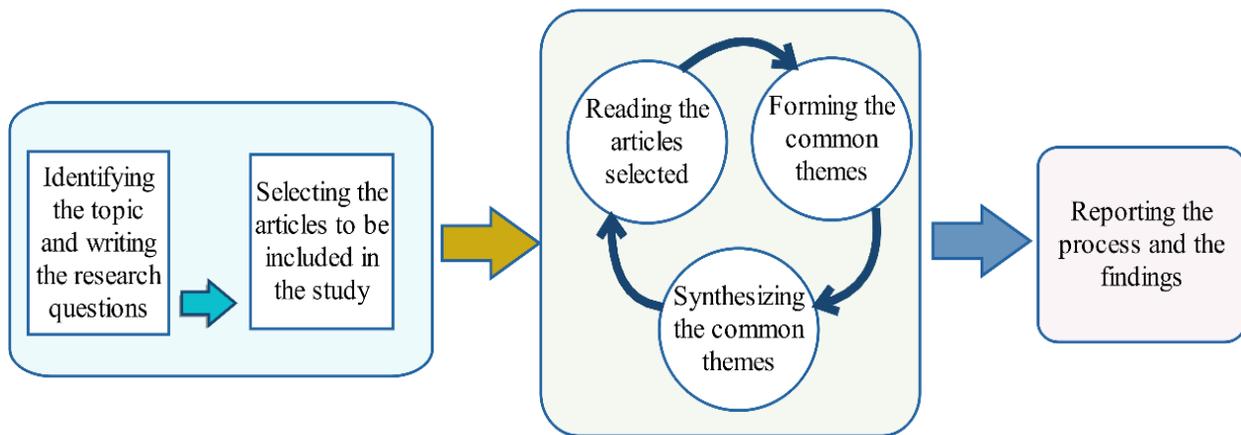
**Fig. 1.** Selection process of the studies included in meta-synthesis

As it is seen in Fig. 1, a set of research was conducted in Web of Science, Scopus, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Google Scholar, Ebcohost, and MEDLINE data bases until 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022 (included) in relation to the individual life structure topic using various key words. These key words included (life structure, Levinson's life structure theory, life structure development, mid-life transition, life cycle, life course, seasons of man's life, seasons of woman's life, structure-building, and structure-changing). Tags and abstracts of the studies included in the study (n = 285) were searched. This phase, the records removed before screening (n = 173). During second phase, abstract, reviews, or book chapter were excluded (n = 69). In the third phase from the remaining articles, theses, and books the studies that included quantitative data and that did not involve transition phases in relation to life structure were

excluded ( $n = 31$ ). In the fourth and the last phase, 12 studies (seven articles and five theses) that investigated the effectiveness of Levinson's individual life structure theory, life course and life cycle concepts or that had these topics at least in one part of the study were included in the analysis.

### Data Analysis

Data collected from the study were analysed using thematic content analysis method. Büyüköztürk et al. (2013) reported that content analysis is a systematic approach that summarises data with coding performed according to previously identified criteria and with the categorization of the word groups in the text. Content analysis involves coding the data, identifying themes, associating codes with those themes, and interpreting findings within the context of the themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Analysis of the studies included in the meta-synthesis was performed following the process steps of meta-synthesis recommended by Polat and Ay (2016). These steps are demonstrated in Fig. 2.



**Search:** Polat & Ay, 2016.

**Fig. 2.** Process steps of meta-synthesis research

As seen in Fig. 2, after clarifying the research questions and selecting the studies for inclusion, the process involved reading the studies, identifying common themes, and synthesizing them in a comparative manner. Theoretical framework about life structure was constantly taken into consideration while performing all these. Based on the steps mentioned above, the primary findings were coded, the codes were grouped to access the categories, and themes were obtained from the categories. The findings were then interpreted (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While these steps were being conducted, coding was performed using the NVivo11 qualitative data analysis program, which enables to see the findings of many studies together and helps to prepare a report and matrix in a short time (Kuş-Saillard, 2009). Coding was performed in a general framework in which the new codes were incorporated in line with the theoretical structure proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The categories and themes produced in this study were presented in the findings section in a detailed way.

### **Credibility, Transferability, and Consistency**

In this qualitative study, credibility was used for internal validity, transferability was used for external validity, and consistency was used for internal reliability in quantitative designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2013; Patton, 2005; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). For the credibility of the study, as the first method, a long-term interaction was experienced by conducting the review of literature and data collection together from the beginning of the research process that is extended over a long time. As the second method, data obtained from the studies that investigated the life structure topic were compared with each other, data were interpreted in light of the related literature, and depth-focused data were targeted. In the third method, variation was done by including studies having different features in the study. Themes and quantifications were visualised together while presenting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Transferability of the study was enhanced initially by presenting the raw data without making any interpretations in a way to make it understandable for the reader; detailed descriptions were made by frequently using direct quotations. Secondly, criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was utilised for the selection of the data sources included in the study. This way, the study aimed to enable analytic generalizations. To enhance consistency, data collection, data analysis and findings were investigated whether they demonstrated a holistic structure throughout the study. In this regard, the raw data recorded in the NVivo11 software and the raw data obtained by the researcher again through different data bases were found to be the same.

Finally, coding reliability over time and observation methods were used (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The reliability formula ( $\text{reliability} = (\text{consensus} / (\text{consensus} + \text{dissensus}) \times 100$ ) by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used by performing coding over the same data set within one-month intervals by the researcher to ensure reliability over time (Miles et al., 2013). Coding reliability over time was found .92. For coding reliability based on observation, two experts who had doctorate degree in the field of adulthood psychology and who were competent in qualitative designs worked together with the researcher in order to associate the categories with appropriate themes. Agreement among the three raters was measured using Fleiss Kappa coefficient (Fleiss, 1971; Cohen & Swerdlik, 2013). According to Kappa coefficient ( $\kappa=.67$ ) obtained from the calculations performed in <http://www.ccitonline.org/jking/homepage/kappa1.xls>, there was a significant agreement between the raters. Dissensus codes were put under the relevant themes as a result of the meetings with the raters. In this regard, reliability of the scores given by the three raters about the “transition period” and “career development” themes were found to be high. To sum up, as a result of applying coding reliability over time and observation, it was concluded that the themes highly matched with each other.

### **Findings**

#### **Transition Period Theme**

The transition period theme was obtained from the analyses conducted in order to reveal the pattern related to the first sub-problem of the study. It was found that central components and environmental components sub-themes were collected under the transition period theme. Life goals and sense of self categories were collected under the central

factors theme; and hobbies and social relationships categories were collected under the environmental factors theme. Table 2 demonstrates the sub-themes and categories in relation to the transition period theme in the studies.

Table 2

*Studies on the transition period theme*

Theme	Sub-theme	Category	Number of Studies (n)	Number of Citations (r)	Related Sample Studies
Transition Period	Environmental	Hobbies	6	9	M1, T1, M5, T2, T4
	Factors	Social Relationships	11	29	M1, T1, M5, T2, M2, M4, M3, T3
	Central Factors	Sense of Self	11	25	T1, M2, M3, M4, T5, M5, T3, M6
		Life Goals	7	13	M1, M4, M5, T2, M7

As it is seen in Table 2, analyses results related to the ways life structures were shaped in adult individuals' transition periods in the studies about life structure showed that half of the studies (n=6, r= 9) were related to the hobbies category of the environmental factors sub-theme, and nearly all of the studies (n=11, r=29) were related to the social relationships category. Almost all of the studies (n=11, r=25) were associated with sense of self category of central factors sub-theme, and more than half of the studies (n=7, r= 13) were associated with the life goals category.

**Environmental Factors.** Primary studies showed that hobbies were an important socializing tool and source of energy (n=6) in adult development in the transition period when expectations from life changes and life is questioned more. A finding in one of the related studies (M5) on this issue was “*spending time with friends by doing sports activities such as football, basketball*”. Another notable finding related to hobbies was about activities done individually during free time. The finding in T2 was stated as “*Dealing with activities such as handicraft and worship, reading books etc.*”.

Social relationships were found to be shaped within the framework of family, work life, and social responsibility during the transition periods of adult individuals (n=11). One of the related studies indicated “*I spend all my time at work. We hang around with friends from work out of work*”. Another remarkable finding regarding social relationships was related to the nongovernmental organizations that enable shared activities. The finding in T3 was reported as “*Socializing by participating in social responsibility activities in some professional and religious charitable foundations*”.

**Central Factors.** Adult individuals' sense of self was found to be shaped by changes in the expectations about future and orientation toward the inner world during transition periods (n=11). One of the related studies reported “*Orienting toward self, changing perceptions about the subjective world instead of thinking about the environment*”. Another finding relation to the sense of self was associated with meeting expectations. The finding in M6 reported “*Experiencing disappointment about realizing the dreams*”. Adult individuals were found to develop life goals for

individual expectations and family life in the transition periods (n=7). One of the related studies (M4) reported “*Having a happy family and a wealth level to live more comfortably*”. Another remarkable finding in relation to life goals is about work life. Life goal in this issue was reported as “*becoming a respected woman in career life*” in M7.

### Career Development Theme

The career development theme was obtained as a result of the analyses conducted in order to reveal the pattern about the second sub-problem of the study. The career development theme was found to include key experiences and advancement in profession sub-themes. The key experiences sub-theme included education life and work life categories, and the advancement in profession sub-theme included success (promotion) and mentor categories. Table 3 demonstrates the sub-themes in relation to the career development theme.

Table 3

*Studies in relation to career development*

Theme	Sub-theme	Category	Number of Studies (n)	Number of Citations (r)	Related Sample Studies
Career Development	Key Experiences	Education Life	5	8	M4, M5, T1, T2, T3
		Work Life	10	17	M4, M7, T2, M3, T3, T5, T1
	Advancement in Profession	Success (Promotion)	6	12	M2, M7, M5, T3,
		Mentor	6	13	M3, M7, T1, M4, T2, T3

As it is seen in Table 3, analysis results about the factors that affected adult individuals' career development showed that nearly half of the studies (n=5, r= 8) were related to the education life category of the key experiences sub-theme, and nearly all of the studies (n=10, r=17) were related to the work life category. Half of the studies (n=6, r=12) were related to success (promotion) category of the advancement in profession sub-theme, and half of the studies (n=6, r= 13) were related to the mentor category.

**Key Experiences.** Turning points in the education life of adult individuals were found to affect their career development (n=5). One of the related studies reported “*I learned taking lessons from the obstacles I faced in my education life. After each trouble, I turned towards different interests that directed my life*”. In addition to this finding, other studies were found to support career development of education life (T1, T3).

Economic income in work life and work and family compatibility seem to affect adult individuals' career development (n=10). A finding in one of the related studies (M7) was “*As a woman, I need to balance between work and family all the time*”. Another interesting finding about work life was related to financial status. A finding in M3 indicated, “*Being financially more comfortable in work life, meeting financial expectations*”.

**Advancement in Profession.** The motivation type demonstrated by adult individuals in their career development was found to affect success (n=6). In this regard, intrinsic motivation seems to be given more importance in career development (n=4). One of the related studies (M7) indicated “*If I receive a reward in work life, what satisfies me is*

*intrinsic satisfaction; this is how you become a respected person*". Another remarkable finding related to success was about work life. The finding in M5 indicated *"The most important indicator of success in work life is to receive rewards, becoming more powerful financially"*.

A mentor was found to contribute to the advancement in the profession and career development of adult individuals (n=6). One of the related studies (T1) reported *"the importance of having someone who is seen as a model and whose experiences are beneficial while improving in work life"*. Another noteworthy finding related to the advancement in profession was about work life. The finding in M7 indicated, *"Views of the people seen as models have significant effects on the decisions to be made"*.

### Discussion

The analysis results regarding the ways adult individuals' lives were shaped during transition periods in the studies about individual life structure showed that hobbies had an important role in leisure activities and in providing source of energy. Review of the related literature indicates several studies that have parallel findings (Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Carpenter, 1992; Carpenter & Patterson, 2004, Muğan-Akıncı, 2013). For instance, Carpenter and Patterson (2004) reported that hobbies were important indicators of leisure activities and organization of the relationships with immediate environment in the early adulthood period. Aktu and İlhan (2017) stated that hobbies were important for leisure activities and helped the formation of life structure. In this regard, hobbies could shape life structures of adult individuals in the transition periods.

Another result of the present study indicated that adult individuals reshaped their life structure in the transition periods. Family was reported to be at the center of adult individuals in a transition period. Sense of self and direction of life goals might change in the transition period in which individuals try to change their expectations and have the tendency to question life more. While sense of self of individuals in a transition period is towards the inner world, their life goals are also shaped according to family life.

A review of the related literature reveals consistent findings various studies (Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Iso-Ahola, Jackson, & Dunn, 1994; Smithson, 2011; Wolfe et al., 1990). For instance, Aktu and İlhan (2017) concluded that adults in a transition period tended to use change-oriented metaphors, while those in the settling-down period favored stability-oriented metaphors. Wolfe et al. (1990) found that individuals in mid-age transition demonstrated the features of a transition period. These features that are shown as the indicators of structure change are listed as flexibility, complication, and independent decision-making. Smithson (2011) found that women in the middle age period went through changes in life structures in the social relationship and meaning of life aspects. Iso-Ahola et al. (1994) found that meaningful life activities such as spending time with family had more importance in the mid-age transition period in comparison to early adulthood. Hence, adult individuals who are in a transition period could experience changes in sense of self and life goals.

To summarise the results of this study related to the first research problem in the studies about individual life structure, hobbies shaped the life structure in transition periods, and individuals in this period went through changes in sense of self and life goals. Therefore, it is important to take these features into consideration in adult individuals

while providing them with individual and group counselling, because changes or crises to be experienced in the life structure in adult individuals' developmental period could cause changes in self-representation, career development, life goals, and social relationships. Due to the aforementioned reasons, it is considered that obtaining common features from the results of the studies about life structure would be beneficial for acknowledging adult individuals' psychological features and providing them with psychological support.

Studies on individual life structure are associated with the ways life structures are shaped and the factors affecting career development in adult individuals' transition periods because life structure of adult individuals continues throughout their career development. Based on this, factors that affect adult individuals' career development in the studies about individual life structure, which is the second problem of the present study, are presented as follows.

Analysis results on the factors that affect adult individuals' career development in the studies about individual life structure showed that the turning points in adult individuals' course of life affected their career development. One of the turning points in the life course is the choices made in their educational life. Another turning point is the financial income change in the work life and achievement of harmony between work and family (Aktu & İlhan, 2017; Green, 2006). Adult individuals seem to form a unique career development and thus shape their life structure accordingly. Review of the related literature indicates parallel findings (Baatjies, 2015; Bell & Lee, 2006; Green, 2006; Larson, 2014; Wink & Dillon, 2002).

For instance, Wink and Dillon (2002), in their study conducted with adults in different developmental periods, concluded that negative life events, experiences, and personality features in the life course affected their career development. Bell and Lee (2006) reported that variables that formed career in early adulthood period in women's life course included leaving home, finishing education life, starting work life, being in an intimate relationship, getting married, and becoming a mother. Green (2006) found that the obstacles in the educational aspect of the life course had effects on career development. In this regard, turning points in adult individuals' life course seem to form their career development.

Another finding in this study indicates that intrinsic motivation was the primary factor in becoming successful in adult individuals' career development. Review of the related literature indicates parallel findings (Baatjies, 2015; Gordon et al., 2002; Green, 2006; Yıldırım-Saatçi & Arıkan, 2014). For instance, Yıldırım-Saatçi and Arıkan (2014) found that intrinsic motivation was more effective for success in adult women's career development. Gordon et al. (2002) found that adult women shaped their career depending on family support. Baatjies (2015) stated that intrinsic satisfaction rather than financial income was the criterion of success in career development. In this regard, the role of intrinsic motivation seems to be the primary factor in demonstrating a successful career life.

As a result of the fifth and final finding in this study, one of the factors that contributes to adult individuals' career development is having a mentor who shares experiences and becomes a role model. The literature indicates parallel findings (Baatjies, 2015; Fouché et al., 2017; Green, 2006; Larson, 2014; Yıldırım-Saatçi & Arıkan, 2014). For instance, Baatjies (2015), Green (2006) and Larson (2014) reported that having a role model in work life in the adulthood years increased success. Yıldırım-Saatçi and Arıkan (2014) found that adult women took successful

women as an example in their career development. Fouché et al. (2017) found that having a mentor during adulthood period contributed to career development. Hence, having a mentor in adulthood years is an important factor that contributes to adult individuals' career development.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Based on the limitations of the present study and the aforementioned results, a number of recommendations could be made to the researchers and practitioners in the field. First of all, in addition to the present study limited with 12 qualitative studies, a wider meta-synthesis study involving mixed method studies could be conducted. The same topic could even be investigated in some certain intervals in order to find out the changes in life structure over time. Using qualitative data analysis software that enhances data analysis process is recommended while conducting these studies. Secondly, based on the results of the present study, a scale on individual life structure could be developed in order to administer it to adult individuals. This way, it could be possible to measure the features that have effects on adult individuals' career development and changes in their life structure involving different aspects. Such study would contribute to the related literature more. Finally, the present meta-synthesis study attempted to reveal patterns for life structure and career development from a holistic point of view. Studies to be conducted in the future might investigate adult individuals' life structures and career development according to various features such as gender, education level and occupation. Mixed method research especially in this topic could yield more generalizable results.

### **Conclusion**

To summarise the results of the second research problem of the present study, intrinsic motivation and mentor were the primary factors that had effects on career development in the studies about individual life structure, and the turning points in adult individuals' life courses shaped their career development. The importance of career development has been increasingly acknowledged due to the rising average life expectancy and the proportion of adulthood in the world (TÜİK, 2016). An adult individual's knowing about the factors that would affect his/her career and the potential problems to be experienced in work life and how to cope with them can shape his/her dreams about future and life goals. In this regard, knowing about the effect of intrinsic motivation and mentor in an individual's career development is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration both for individuals to achieve success in work life and for the psychological support to be provided by the experts working in the field of career counselling.

### **Ethic**

I confirm that the research was conducted in compliance with the ethical standarts set by institutional and/or national research committee, as well as the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its subsequent amendments or equivalent ethical standarts.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

**Funding**

No scholarships or payments have been received from any institution for this manuscript.

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