

## *Aging Well: Health and Wellness Among Older Adults*

Piper Neal

Presented to Senior Projects Day, Dr. H. Island, Pacific University, Forest Grove, OR. April 26, 2023

### Background and Problem

The baby boomer generation, one of the largest age cohorts, takes up to 21.16% of the population of the United States, second to only the Millennials who hold up to 21.75% of the population. When combined with the Greatest Generation and the Silent Generation (.26% and 5.76% of the population respectively), all three age cohorts, which range from ages of 59 years of age and older, mean that the majority of the adult demographic is in the late adulthood stage of life (Duffin, 2021). That percentage of late adulthood, roughly 56 million adults, is expected to double by 2060 (Population Reference Bureau, 2023). Erik Erikson, a theorist of psychological development across the lifespan, categorized late adulthood, also known as old adulthood, to be 65 years of age and older (1993). Erikson proposed that during this stage of the human lifespan, the human psyche confronts the introspective reflection of life accomplishments in order to determine personal life satisfaction. In 2015, the World Health Organization, known as WHO, expanded the organization's definition of healthy aging into "the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age" (World Health Organization). With this newer definition, WHO addressed that the matter of healthy aging is not over when the disease is avoided or absent in late adulthood (Michel et al., 2019). Despite the headway made by organizations like WHO and various researchers related to the gerontological field on narrowing the meaning of aging well, they have yet to accomplish a common measure between them that is not specific to a singular science or profession related to late adulthood.

The purpose of this study was to better characterize aspects vital to end-of-life satisfaction and subjective wellness (i.e., emotional health) as well as have a comprehensive picture of "aging well".

### Empirical Questions

What is the relationship between life engagement and emotional health? Is greater emotional wellness predictive of physical health? How does a growth mindset emotional health?

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were convenience and snowball sampled through social groups, word-of-mouth, social media, and church groups, resulting in 58 participants. There were 15 male and 43 female participants ( $N = 58$ ) with an average age of 73.9 years ( $SD = 10.02$ ).

#### Materials

The materials for this study included a standard demographic measure as well as the following published, cited measures:

**Modified Version of The Worry Domains Questionnaire (WDQ)** assesses nonclinical worries across six subscales in order adults through a 35-item Likert agreement scale. The six subscales address worries pertaining to relationships, lack of confidence, aimless future, socio-political, financials, and concerns about health and healthcare (Tallis et al., 1992).

**Life Satisfaction Rating (LRS)** assesses the relationship between life satisfaction or well-being and other social and psychological variables that are tangible and applied to other studies, using a 20-item questionnaire on a 5-point Likert agreement scale (Neugarten, et al., 1961).

**The Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (RLSS)** is a 23-item self-report measure using a 5-point Likert scale evaluating life satisfaction and life regret based on participants' level of self-assessed regret, envy, as well as the desire to change (Margolis et al., 2018).

**The Life Engagement Test** assesses engagement by evaluating the frequency of interacting with valued activities. The assessment is through a 6-item Likert agreement scale (Scheier et al., 2006).

**The Subjective Happiness Scale** assesses whether the participants viewed themselves to be happy or unhappy with their lives in comparison to how they perceived other individuals, through two separate 5-point Likert agreement scales (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1997).

**Mindset Questionnaire** measures the perception of intelligence and learning through 20 questions on a 5-point Likert scale, with the range starting from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' (Dweck, 2006).

### Design and Procedure

This descriptive survey research used Qualtrics online software to administer the surveys and administered implicit informed consent.

### Results

To assess the predictions, Pearson's  $r$  was conducted for correlations between all of the measures and demographics. The first prediction that greater life engagement would result in higher scores for emotional health was supported as Life Engagement test was positively correlated with Life Satisfaction Rating,  $r(53) = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , as well as the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale,  $r(49) = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , and Subjective Happiness Scale,  $r(54) = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The second prediction of participants with a growth mindset having a higher emotional health score was supported as the Mindset Questionnaire had positive correlations with Life Satisfaction Rating,  $r(48) = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.010$ , as well as the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale,  $r(51) = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.00$ , and Subjective Happiness Scale,  $r(50) = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The third prediction of having a growth mindset would indicate worries was not supported by the present study's sample size, but it is possible that it could be in future research with more participants. Lastly, the fourth prediction of greater emotional wellness being predictive of physical health was supported by positive correlations between Physical Health and Life Satisfaction Rating,  $r(53) = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.002$ , and the Riverside Life Satisfaction Score,  $r(51) = 0.33$ ,  $p = 0.015$ , as well as Life Engagement Test,  $r(56) = 0.286$ ,  $p = 0.033$ .

### Discussion

This study intended to further the understanding of the facets of emotional wellness and to construct a more comprehensive definition of aging well. The result of this study found that life engagement has a role in overall subjective happiness and life satisfaction for those in late adulthood. Additionally, emotional wellness is affected by the state of one's mindset and in turn can be predictive of physical health. The findings within this study provide information for the aging population on what factors currently in their life can positively influence their lives in late adulthood. Future studies could benefit from researching the mindsets of older adults and emotional wellness in late adulthood.

## References

*APA Dictionary of Psychology*. (n.d.).

Bodner, E., & Cohen-Fridel, S. (2010). Relations between attachment styles, ageism and quality of life in late life. *International psychogeriatrics*, 22(8), 1353–1361. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610210001249>

Bousquet, J., Malva, J., Nogues, M., Mañas, L. R., Vellas, B., Farrell, J., & MACVIA Research Group (2015). Operational Definition of Active and Healthy Aging (AHA): The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on AHA Reference Site Questionnaire: Montpellier October 20–21, 2014, Lisbon July 2, 2015. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 16(12), 1020–1026.

Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., and Oishi, S. (2002). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and the life satisfaction. *Handbook Positive Psychol.* 2, 63–73.

Duffin, E. (2022, September 30). *Resident population of the United States by sex and age as of July 1, 2021*. Statista.

Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and Society*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Fullen, M. C. (2019). Defining Wellness in Older Adulthood: Toward a Comprehensive Framework. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 97(1), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12236>

Gholizadeh, A., & Shirani, E. (2010). Relationships among individual, familial, social, economic and life satisfaction of the elderly of Isfahan. *Applied Sociology*, 21(37), 69–82.

Michel, J. P., Graf, C., & Ecarnot, F. (2019). Individual healthy aging indices, measurements and scores. *Aging clinical and experimental research*, 31(12), 1719–1725. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40520-019-01327-y>

Michel, J. P., & Sadana, R. (2017). "Healthy Aging" concepts and measures. *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, 18(6), 460–464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamda.2017.03.008>

Papi, S., & Cheraghi, M. (2021). Multiple factors associated with life satisfaction in older adults. *Menopause Review/Przegląd Menopauzalny*, 20(2), 65–71.

World Health Organization. (2015). *World report on ageing and health*. World Health Organization.