

Aging men: More uplifts, fewer hassles until the age of 65-70

February 20 2014

A new study of how men approach their golden years found that how happy individuals are remains relatively stable for some 80 percent of the population, but perceptions of unhappiness – or dealing with "hassles" – tends to get worse once you are about 65-70 years old.

The reasons vary, researchers say, but may be because of health issues, cognitive decline or the loss of a spouse or friends.

"In general, life gets better as you age in the sense that [older adults](#) on average have fewer hassles – and respond to them better – than younger adults," said Carolyn Aldwin, a gerontology professor in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State University and lead author on the study. "And they also experienced more uplifts – a least, until their mid-70s."

"But once you turn 70, how you react to these hassles changes and may be dependent on your resources or your situation in life," added Aldwin, the Jo Anne Leonard endowed director of OSU's Center for Healthy Aging Research.

Results of the study, which was funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs, are being published in the journal *Psychology and Aging*.

The researchers used data from the Veterans Affairs Normative Aging Study, which looked at 1,315 men ages 53 to 85 years of age –

predominantly comprised of white males who were initially in good health at entry into the study in the 1960s. This particular study aimed to take a fresh look at the emotional reactions of older adults and evaluate whether three previously established, yet contradictory models of aging had validity.

One of those models, known as the hedonic treadmill model, suggests that how happy or unhappy you are is relatively stable through your life, outside of a few up-or-down blips. A second theory posits that in general things get better as you age, while the third says your life will spiral downhill rapidly once you turn 80.

The new study, led by researchers from Oregon State and Boston University, found some support for all three models, depending on whether you looked at hassles or uplifts – and the age of the men. How men appraised their uplifts was stable, the researchers say, supporting the hedonic treadmill theory. But how they appraised hassles depended on their age: Appraisals got better through their 60s, but then started to become more severe in their 70s.

Nonetheless, Aldwin noted, some men respond more intensely to life's ups and downs than others, but both the perception and intensity of these events is highly variable among individuals.

"What we found was that among 80 percent of the men in the study, the hassles they encounter from their early 50s on tended to decline until they reached about 65 to 70 years of age, and then they rose," Aldwin pointed out. "Conversely, about 20 percent of the men perceived experiencing more uplifting events until they turned 65-70 and they begin to decline."

The study drew from the perceptions of the [men](#) over events in their lives that were big and small, positive and negative. Self-regulation – or

how they respond to those events – varied, Aldwin said.

"Some older people continue to find sources of happiness late in life despite dealing with family losses, declining health, or a lack of resources," she said. "You may lose a parent, but gain a grandchild. The kids may leave the house, but you bask in their accomplishments as adults. You find value in gardening, volunteering, caregiving or civic involvement."

Aging is neither exclusively rosy nor depressing, Aldwin said, and how you react to hassles and uplifts as a 55- to 60-year-old may change as you enter what researchers call "the fourth age," from 75 to 100, based on your perceptions and/or your life experiences.

"Who falls into these groups and why can begin to tell us what kind of person ultimately may be happy late in life and who may not," Aldwin said. "Once we find that out, we can begin interventions."

Provided by Oregon State University

Citation: Aging men: More uplifts, fewer hassles until the age of 65-70 (2014, February 20) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-02-aging-men-uplifts-hassles-age.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--