

Perceived control reduces mortality risk at low, not high, education levels

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This is Nicholas Turiano, Ph.D., department of Psychiatry at the University of Rochester and lead author of the study. Credit: University of Rochester

Personality researchers find having a sense of control over one's life can reduce mortality rates in people who have little education, but a sense of control does not influence mortality rates in people with higher levels of

education.

The less education you have, the more your attitude counts when it comes to staying alive and well.

That's the finding of a new study conducted by personality researchers from the University of Rochester and Brandeis University. They found that adults without college degrees live longer if they feel like they're in control of their lives. Those who feel little control are three times as likely to die.

"Being uneducated and poor doesn't mean you're doomed, despite all of the studies showing people with less education are more likely to experience disease, disability, and [premature death](#)," says lead author Nicholas Turiano, Ph.D., a post-fellow in Psychiatry at the U of R.

The study, published by the American Psychological Association's *Health Psychology* journal, followed 6,135 people, ages 25 to 75, for 14 years. The respondents were part of an ongoing, national questionnaire called the National Survey of Midlife in the United States. It collects a variety of data, including an assessment of each subject's perceived ability to exert influence over life circumstances. Researchers adjusted for socioeconomic factors such as income and the [education level](#) of the subjects' parents. Turiano says that even after these other variables are taken into account, the findings held. Sense of control did not affect the mortality rate of people with [higher levels](#) of [education](#).

Turiano cautions more research is needed to find out why or how people develop a strong sense of control, or when this development occurs. Researchers suspect numerous innate and external factors contribute to perceived control. Turiano says further study could lead to interventions that help this population feel more positive and, ultimately, live longer.

Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center

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