

Researchers seek answers to help overcome life's challenges

February 7 2017, by John Evans



Credit: University of Bath

A new research project is to investigate the ways in which different people cope with crises, why some sail through life, yet others struggle.

Researchers in the Department of Psychology want to draw on the experiences of [people](#) aged 65 and older because they are most likely to have witnessed and lived through the greatest number of life-affecting events, and the most difficult ones. These could be personal, like dealing with bereavement, [medical emergencies](#) and declining physical capacity, or shared with other people – for instance those in their eighties and nineties who endured conflict and post-war austerity in the 1940s and 1950s.

Volunteers will be asked to complete detailed questionnaires about life experiences from childhood to older age, their friendships and careers, any [mental health problems](#), and current physical and emotional health. The survey can be completed online, on paper and by post, over the telephone, or face-to-face (including home visits) for people living in the Bath and Bristol areas, and Wiltshire.

Bouncing back

Traditionally, experts have tried to understand why some people can bounce back from adversity by analysing external factors that might prevent people from reacting in the manner in which they might be expected. But the most recent research has focused on the strengths that individuals possess that enable them to cope when things go wrong. An ageing population provides a greater opportunity to draw lessons from longer lives.



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By identifying those who are seen to adapt well to change and can handle difficulties, it is hoped that the research will help clinicians dealing with both mental and physical health to better realise when individuals may be in need of extra support, and what that support may be. It could also help patients see and value their own strengths and achievements and build up greater resilience during treatment.

Lead to better diagnosis

Priya Patel, who is studying for a doctorate in clinical psychology and

has experience in the NHS, is leading the research project at the University.

She said: "Increasingly, it is being recognised that some people view challenges as opportunities and thrive in the face of adversity, but for many others that is more difficult. We hope this research can unlock the reasons why, and lead to better diagnosis and care when people struggle under pressure."

The research study will compare responses from volunteers, including those from around Bath, Bristol and Wiltshire, County Durham and North Yorkshire, and others who have been receiving treatment from the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust, and its counterpart in the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys.

Provided by University of Bath

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