

Well-being in later life—the mind plays an important role

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Well-being in later life is largely dependent on psychosocial factors. Physical impairments tend to play a secondary role, as scientists at the Helmholtz Zentrum München and the Technical University of Munich (TUM) have discovered. The results of their recent study are published in *BMC Geriatrics*.

"Ageing itself is not inevitably associated with a decline in mood and quality of life," says Prof. Karl-Heinz Ladwig, summarizing the results. "It is rather the case that psychosocial factors such as depression or anxiety impair subjective well-being, the Head of the Mental Health Research Group at the Institute of Epidemiology II, Helmholtz Zentrum München and Professor of Psychosomatic Medicine at the TUM University Hospital explains. "And in the case of women, living alone also plays an important role."

For the current study, Prof. Ladwig and his team relied on data derived from about 3,600 participants with an average age of 73 who had taken part in the population-based KORA-Age Study. "What made the study particularly interesting was the fact that the impact of stress on [emotional well-being](#) has barely been investigated in a broader, non-clinical context," explains PD Dr. Karoline Lukaschek, epidemiologist in the Mental Health Research Group and lead author of the paper. "Our study therefore explicitly included anxiety, depression and sleep disorders."

Generally high levels of well-being

To ascertain levels of subjective well-being, the scientists used a questionnaire devised by the World Health Organization (the WHO-5 Well-Being Index) with a score range of 0 to 100. For the purpose of analysis, they divided the respondents' results into two categories: 'high' (score > 50) and 'low' (score ≤ 50). The subsequent evaluation revealed a high level of subjective well-being in the majority (79 percent) of the respondents. The average values were also above the threshold set by the WHO. In the 'low' group, however, there was a conspicuously high number of women: about 24 percent compared to 18 percent for men.

Depression and anxiety disorders are the biggest risk

Trying to uncover the most important causes for subjective well-being, the scientists mainly identified [psychosocial factors](#): above all, depression and [anxiety disorders](#) had the strongest effect on well-being. Low income and sleep disorders also had a negative effect. However, poor physical health (for example, low physical activity or so-called multimorbidity) seemed to have little impact on perceived life satisfaction. Among women, living alone also significantly increased the probability of a low sense of well-being.

"The findings of the current study clearly demonstrate that appropriate services and interventions can play a major role for older people, especially for older women living on their own," Prof. Ladwig says, categorizing the results. "And this is all the more important, given that we know that high levels of subjective well-being are linked to a lower mortality risk."

More information: Karoline Lukaschek et al. "In the mood for ageing": determinants of subjective well-being in older men and women

of the population-based KORA-Age study, *BMC Geriatrics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1186/s12877-017-0513-5](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-017-0513-5)

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