

# A majority of middle-aged people show a high level of mental well-being

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A recent study at the University of Jyväskylä has found a surprisingly high level of mental well-being among middle-aged individuals.

The study examined multiple dimensions of mental well-being, including satisfaction with life and psychological and social well-being.

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's sense of having a purpose in life and personal growth, whereas social well-being is characterized by a sense of environmental mastery and acceptance.

Research Director Katja Kokko from the Gerontology Research Center at the University of Jyväskylä:

"Our analyses provided two new perspectives to the study of mental well-being: First, we included positive dimensions of mental well-being and did not consider it only as an absence of mental distress. Second, while it is common to analyze an average developmental trend of mental well-being over time, we looked for groups of individuals differing in their developmental trajectories."

Mental well-being was assessed when the study participants were 36, 42, and 50 years old. During this follow-up period, four groups of mental well-being emerged. 29 percent of the participants were classified as having a high level of life satisfaction as well as psychological and social well-being throughout the study period. Further, 47 percent had a relatively high and 22 percent a moderately high level of mental well-being. Conversely, about 3 percent of the participants had a relatively

low score in all the well-being dimensions from age 36 to 50.

"It was a bit unexpected how stable mental well-being was in mid-adulthood and that a majority of the middle-aged had such a high level of well-being," Kokko explains. "However, it should be noted that the follow-up intervals were rather long, about 6 to 8 years, and it is possible that within those years mental well-being fluctuated but then returned to an individual's characteristic level."

The groups of mental well-being were compared to each other in other areas of functioning as well. The individuals on the trajectories for high, relatively high, and moderate well-being had more satisfying relationships, more favorable working careers, and fewer diseases than those individuals on the low well-being trajectory. Few differences between the groups were observed in physical or cognitive functioning.

"We found that only stable low mental well-being, developed over a lengthy period of time, was a risk factor for unfavorable relationships, working career, and health," Kokko says. "In older adulthood, mental well-being will possibly also relate to physical and [cognitive functioning](#) when there is more variation among the individuals in these areas."

The present analyses shed light on the development of multi-dimensionally assessed mental well-being in mid-adulthood. They further help identify those groups of [individuals](#) who are at the greatest risk. Improving their [mental well-being](#) can contribute to functioning in old adulthood.

The article is based on the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development (JYLS), where the development of the same, age-cohort representative, participants (369 initially) has been followed from age 8 to 50.

**More information:** Katja Kokko et al. Longitudinal profiles of mental well-being as correlates of successful aging in middle age, *International Journal of Behavioral Development* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0165025417739177](https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025417739177)

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