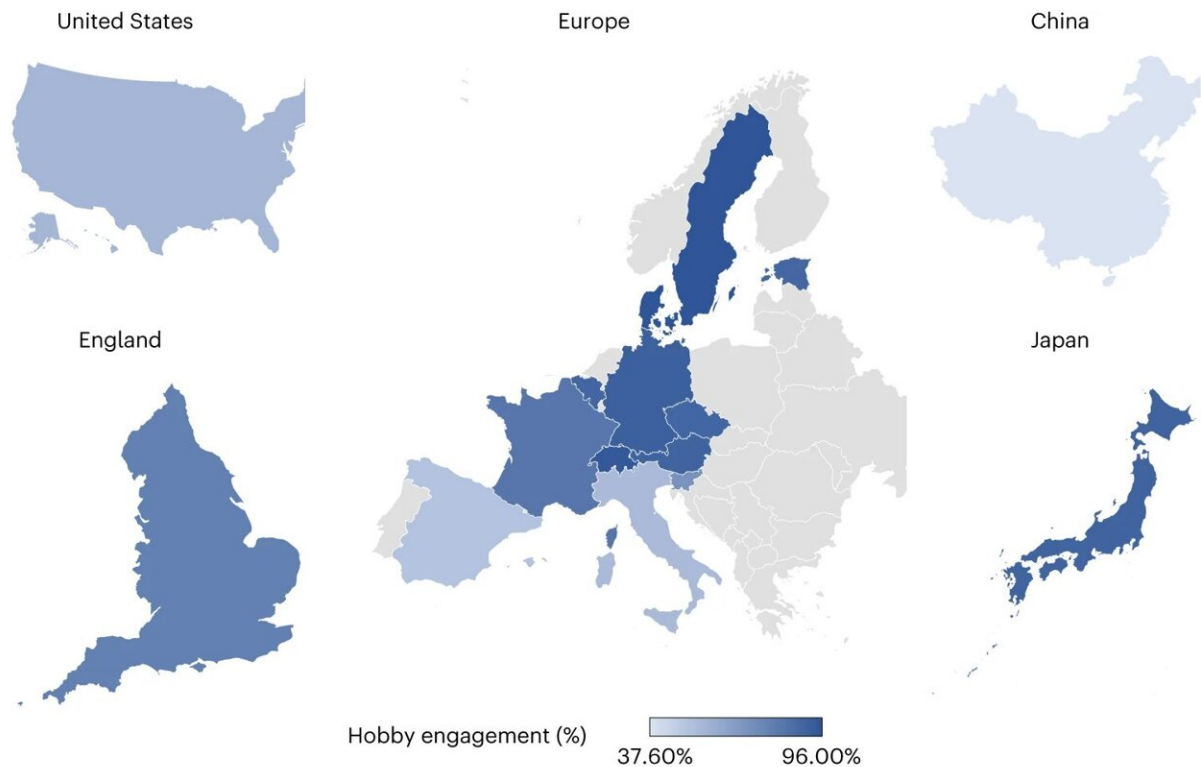


Hobbies linked to lower depression levels among older people

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Levels of hobby engagement. Levels of hobby engagement among older adults aged 65 and above across 16 nations. Credit: *Nature Medicine* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41591-023-02506-1

Having a hobby is linked to fewer depressive symptoms and higher levels of happiness, self-reported health and life satisfaction among

people aged 65 and over, and this holds true across 16 countries on three continents, according to a new study led by UCL (University College London) researchers.

The study, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, aimed to see if the benefits of hobbies were consistent in different national settings, and looked at data from 93,263 people aged 65 or over who had enrolled in five existing longitudinal studies in England, Japan, United States, China and 12 European countries.

Analyzing data from participants spanning four to eight years, the researchers found that having a hobby was also linked to subsequent decreases in depressive symptoms and increases in happiness and life satisfaction, suggesting there might be a causal effect, although as an [observational study](#) it could not prove causality.

These results remained after adjusting for other factors such as partnership status, employment and household income.

The study found the benefits of having a hobby were relatively universal, with only small differences between countries.

Lead author Dr. Karen Mak (UCL Institute of Epidemiology & Health Care) said, "Our study shows the potential of hobbies to protect older people from age-related decline in [mental health](#) and well-being. This potential is consistent across many countries and cultural settings."

"Of the four outcomes, life satisfaction was most strongly linked to hobby engagement. Hobbies may contribute to life satisfaction in our later years through many mechanisms, including feeling in control of our minds and bodies, finding a purpose in life, and feeling competent in tackling daily issues."

"Theoretical work suggests the relationship between hobbies and well-being may cut both ways—that people with better mental [health](#) may be more likely to take up a hobby, and persisting with a hobby may help us to retain improved [life satisfaction](#)."

"Our research also supports policymakers in promoting access to hobbies among [older people](#) as a way to enhance their well-being and health."

Hobbies, defined as activities people engage in during their [leisure time](#) for pleasure, might range from volunteering or being part of a club to reading, gardening, playing games, and arts and crafts.

The researchers found the proportion of people who said they had a hobby varied considerably between countries, with 51% of study participants in Spain reporting having a hobby, compared to 96% in Denmark, 95.8% in Sweden and 94.4% in Switzerland.

China had the lowest level of hobby engagement, at 37.6%, but researchers cautioned that study respondents in China were asked only about social hobbies, not hobbies in general.

In countries with better life expectancy and national happiness levels, more people reported having a hobby, and also the link between well-being and having a hobby was stronger in those countries.

The five [longitudinal studies](#) were: the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA), the Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study (JAGES), US Health and Retirement Study (HRS), Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), and China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS). In ELSA, JAGES, and HRS, participants were asked about hobbies and the word was not defined; in SHARE and CHARLS, participants were asked if they engaged in a specific list of hobbies.

More information: Daisy Fancourt, Hobby engagement and mental wellbeing among people aged 65 years and older in 16 countries, *Nature Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41591-023-02506-1](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-023-02506-1).
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