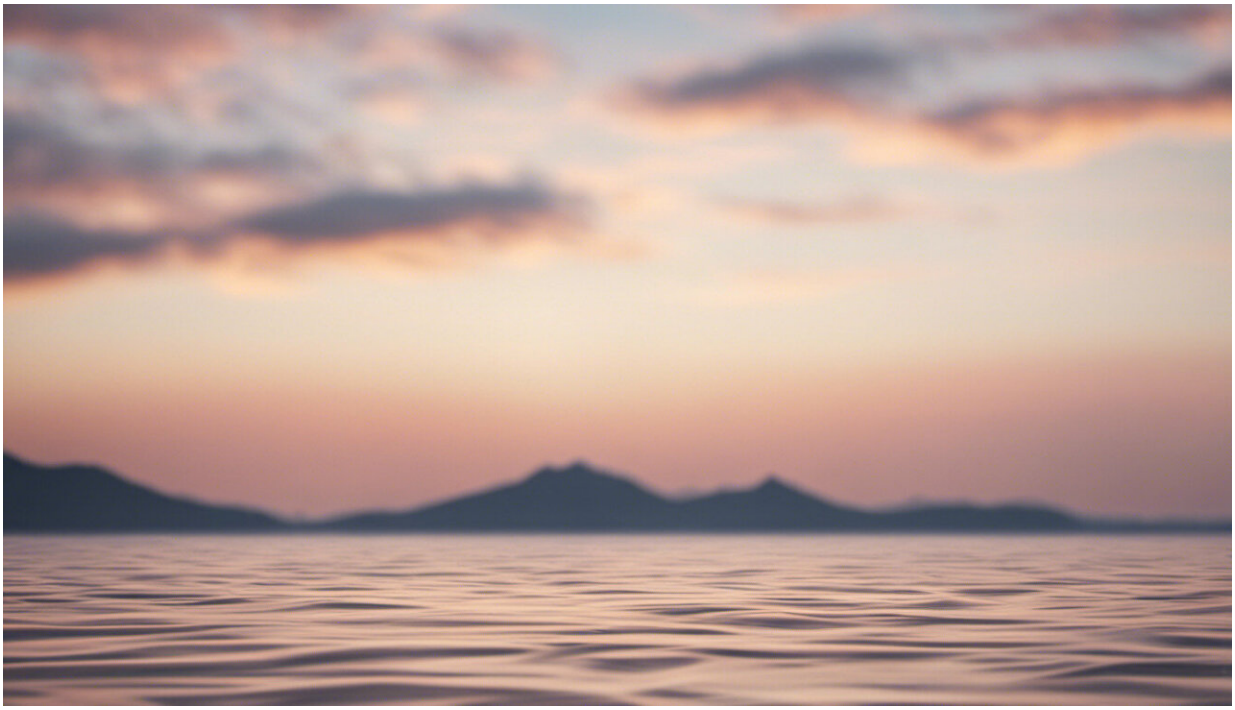
Study finds feeling in control may increase longevity

February 5 2014, by Leah Burrows



Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

(Medical Xpress)—Do you believe in your own ability to succeed, or do you believe life events are largely beyond your control?

Think carefully about your answer—it could affect your risk of mortality.

People who feel in control and believe they can achieve goals despite hardships are more likely to live longer and healthier lives, especially among those with less education, according to a new study by Brandeis University and the University of Rochester. The study was published online in the journal of *Health Psychology*.

Previous studies have shown that people with a high school diploma or less education tend to die younger than those with a college degree or graduate training. Yet, that's not a hard and fast rule. Why?

In this study, less educated people with higher perceived control in their life had a mortality rate three times lower than those with a lower sense of control. In fact, a high sense of control seemed to negate the mortality risks of lower education, says Margie Lachman, the Minnie and Harold Fierman Professor of Psychology, and an author on the paper.

"A high sense of control all but wipes out educational differences when it comes to mortality," Lachman says. "A person with less education but a high sense of control is practically indistinguishable from a person of high education."

Researchers determined attitudes about perceived control by asking participants to rank agreement to a set of statements. For example, participants were given the statement, "Sometimes I feel I am being pushed around in my life," and asked to rank their agreement from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree).

The study's public health implications are exciting, says Lachman.

"There are methods and strategies for improving one's sense of control, and educational experiences are one of them," Lachman says. "We could implement those approaches in educational and public health programs aimed at increasing health-promoting attitudes and behaviors and

ultimately lowering mortality risks."

Provided by Brandeis University

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