

RESEARCH SUMMARY SERIES NO. 6

EUROPEAN STUDY OF ADULT WELL-BEING

EUROPEAN MODEL ON AGEING WELL

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The research project “Ageing Well: A European Study of Adult Well-Being” (ESAW) aims at building a European socio-cultural model able to identify the main factors, along with personal characteristics and culture, which exert a direct causal contribution to the outcome variable *ageing well*. The components included in the study are the following five: physical health and functional status; self resources; life activity; material security; and social support. The project was carried out in 2002-2003 in 6 European countries (Austria, Italy, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom). It is based on individual interviews administered by means of a structured questionnaire to national samples of 1,800-2,000 non institutionalised subjects (i.e. not hospitalised nor in long term care facilities), aged 50-90, in each of the involved countries – an overall sample size of 12,000+.

Introduction. Age-related changes are primarily described by an increasing rate of losses compared with a decreasing number of gains, and the adaptation to those changes poses one of the core questions of gerontological research. Within the European Model of Ageing Well this question was addressed by relating two indicators of psychological well-being to the individual

estimation of four life domains. In particular, life satisfaction and feelings of self-worth were chosen as indicators of psychological well-being, and these were best predicted by estimates of (1) material security, (2) physical health and functional status, (3) social support resources, and (4) life activities.

Methodology. Structural equation modelling was used to estimate the predictive power of

the four life domains under consideration for life satisfaction and feelings of self-worth. Each life domain as well as the criteria was measured by using two indicator variables.

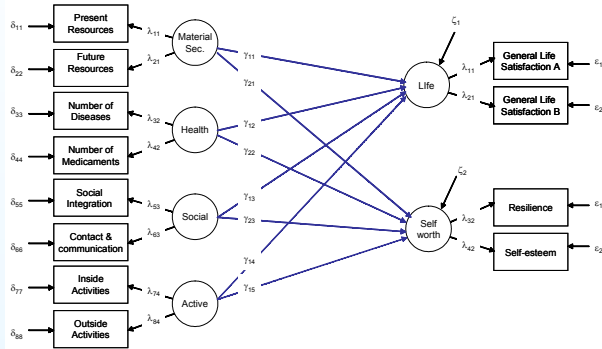


Figure: European Model of Ageing well

Key results. The amount of explained variance in life satisfaction was quite high ranging between $.30 < R^2 < .57$ in the national samples; the least variance explanation was obtained in the Austrian, the most in the UK sample. Although the amount of variance explained with respect to feelings of self-worth was lower than for life satisfaction it was still significant and substantial, and ranged between $.22 < R^2 < .37$. The lowest variance explanation was observed in the Luxembourg sample and the highest was registered in the Swedish sample. The national prediction profiles follow:

The Netherlands: Material security ($\gamma=.42$) had the highest impact on life satisfaction, followed by perceived health condition ($\gamma=.25$), and social support resources ($\gamma=.16$); life activities did not contribute to the prediction of life satisfaction ($R^2=.44$). Social support resources ($\gamma=.25$), material security ($\gamma=.24$), and perceived health ($\gamma=.20$) explained 23% of variance in self-worth.

Luxembourg: Material security showed the highest impact ($\gamma=.41$) on life satisfaction, followed by health ($\gamma=.28$) and life activities ($\gamma=.12$). Social support resources did not contribute to the overall variance explanation of 40% within that sample. 22% of variance in feelings of self-worth was explained, material security ($\gamma=.29$) and health ($\gamma=.22$), and social support resources ($\gamma=.11$) were significant predictors. The frequency of life activities did not predict self-worth.

Italy: All four variables significantly predicted 33% of interindividual variance in life satisfaction (Social support resources ($\gamma=.27$), material security ($\gamma=.20$), health ($\gamma=.20$), and life activities ($\gamma=.17$)). Social support resources also proved to be the

most significant predictor ($\gamma=.29$) for feelings of self-worth, followed by life activities ($\gamma=.18$), perceived health status ($\gamma=.16$), and material security ($\gamma=.12$).

Austria: 30% of the variance of life satisfaction was explained; the contribution of health ($\gamma=.29$) and material security ($\gamma=.28$) were more important than social support resources ($\gamma=.14$) and life activities ($\gamma=.11$). 27% of the variance in feelings of self-worth was explained by social support resources ($\gamma=.30$), perceived health ($\gamma=.21$), material security ($\gamma=.15$) and life activities ($\gamma=.09$).

United Kingdom. Material security ($\gamma=.52$) and life activities ($\gamma=.35$) were the only significant predictors of life satisfaction accounting for 57% of the variance. Perceived material security ($\gamma=.34$) also proved to be the most important predictor for feelings of self-worth followed by life activities ($\gamma=.29$), perceived health ($\gamma=.09$), and social support resources ($\gamma=.09$), accounting for 24% of variance.

Sweden. All four predictors were significant, explaining 49% of variance in life satisfaction. Material security was by far the most important predictor ($\gamma=.53$), followed by health ($\gamma=.20$), social support resources ($\gamma=.19$), and life activities ($\gamma=.09$). Feelings of self-worth ($R^2=.37$) were predicted by perceived health ($\gamma=.32$), material security ($\gamma=.27$), social support resources ($\gamma=.27$), and life activities ($\gamma=.11$).

Summary. Keeping in mind, that in part differential prediction patterns were observed across the national samples, the significance of the predictors for life satisfaction may be weighted as follows relying on the results obtained in the total sample: Perceived material security represented by far the most important predictor ($\gamma=.44$), followed by perceived health status ($\gamma=.24$). High frequency of life activities ($\gamma=.14$) as well as perceived social support resources ($\gamma=.13$) predicted life satisfaction in a less pronounced way. Material security ($\gamma=.23$), perceived health status ($\gamma=.20$), and social support resources ($\gamma=.20$) had a comparable predictive weight for feelings of self-worth; life activities had the lowest predictive power ($\gamma=.12$).

Policy implications. Material security proved to be one of the most important predictors, and the results obtained emphasise the need for legislation, which protects (or enhances) pensions, since people need to feel that their income is secure for the future. Social policy would be well advised to promote measures, which guarantee material security.

be given to preventive health care information and education commencing early in the ageing process. Impaired mobility can result in reduced access to social resources as well as life activities, and this fosters the need for appropriate transport facilities providing easy entry to buses and trains. Domiciliary services which maintain people near to family and friends and allow for a comparatively active life should also be encouraged.

The results stress the importance of health to older people. Consideration should

Other documents in the European Study of Adult Well-Being Report Summary Series:

- No 2. Life Activities
- No 3. Physical Health and Functional Status
- No 4. Self-Resources in Advanced and Old Age
- No 5. Material Security
- No 6. European Model of Ageing Well
- No 7. Contextualising adult well-being: Socio-cultural differences

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