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Longitudinal Psychosocial Predictors of Life Satisfaction in Old Persons

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Abstract

Life satisfaction has been regarded as indicator of psychological adaptation in ageing, but also as linked to health. It has been suggested that positive emotions promote a more active lifestyle and a motivation toward self-care. Predictors of life satisfaction in old age, determined predominantly by cross-sectional research, were social engagement, self-perceived health, and depression, adversely. There are no conclusive results on longitudinal predictors of life satisfaction including social, physical and cognitive functioning in old persons.

The aim of this longitudinal study was to determine the predictive contribution of psychosocial factors to the life satisfaction in old persons.

Participants were 138 retirement homes’ residents in Zagreb, Croatia, 22% men, 78% women, aged 69-100 years, average 84 (56-96 years, average 79 at baseline), ambulatory and not diagnosed with dementia. Variables were: sociodemographic, depression, self-perceived health, functional ability, cognitive function, social participation. Measurement was applied three times: baseline in 2008, and two follow-ups in 2010 and in 2016, individually, by trained interviewers. Life satisfaction variable was measured only in 2016.

Regression analyses results indicated that the observed set of predictors explained 31,6% of the life satisfaction variance (R2 = 0,316). The strongest cross-sectional predictor was self-perceived health, and the significant longitudinal predictors were baseline depression and cognitive function.

The implications of this study are in recognizing and modifying factors that affect life satisfaction, by both medical and psychological interventions.