

What Keeps Older Adults Happy?: A Systematic Review of Subjective Well Being

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Abstract: Subjective well-being is a form of self-evaluation of life by referring to cognitive and affective aspects. This systematic review analyzes 13 international journals on factors influencing older adults' subjective well-being. The review planning uses the SPIDER formulation: Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research Type. This review analysis shows that older people can feel the meaning and satisfaction of life, spread positive things, and have a sense of security and happiness. The results of the systematic review analysis show that various factors influence subjective well-being in the elderly. Several factors can influence subjective well-being in terms of demographics, social activities, physiological factors, and psychological factors. Among them are volunteer activities, economic income, family support, participation in various social and religious activities, education, physical health, income satisfaction, spirituality and religiosity, positive experiences and emotions, sleep quality, self-efficacy, and internet use. These results can be a reference and recommendation for conducting further and more specific research on subjective well-being factors in older adults.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, happiness, older adults.

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Introduction

Each period of human life always coincides with a period of development. The period of human development occurs from prenatal to neonatal, infant to childhood, prepuberty, puberty, adulthood, early, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. Middle adulthood is the period from early to late adulthood with an age range between 40-65 years, while late adulthood is over 65 years. This period is often called late adulthood or old age (elderly) (Santrock, 2019). However, according to Law No. 13 of 1998 concerning the welfare of the elderly, an individual is considered elderly if they have reached the age of over 60 years (Harnianti et al., 2020). Each individual follows interrelated sequential stages of development. Things that happen during their development will impact the next period. The final stage of human development is in late adulthood, called old age. During this period, degenerative processes generally occur in all biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional aspects. Uniquely, not everyone can experience this period; the older an individual gets, the longer they will experience late adulthood (Warsah et al., 2023).

In old age, individuals will experience many changes. This can be seen from the decline in physical abilities and appearance, such as skin that begins to wrinkle, loosen, and feel dry, loss of teeth, decreased hearing, weakening of the eye muscles and loss of the lens' ability to capture and record objects, weakening of the bones so that they can no longer support large loads, and loss of muscle mass and strength resulting in joint inflammation. Thus, older people will quickly get tired and sick because their bodies are less than optimal when doing activities. Likewise with the decline in cognitive abilities. The elderly face fantastic changes compared to the previous phase, such as delays in information processing, reduced ability to concentrate, difficulty identifying problems, slowed decision-making, and declining memory (Pospos et al., 2022). This is also reinforced by gerontologists' statements that older people tend to be easily confused and forgetful (Salthouse, 2019). Several aspects influence the aging process of the elderly. Biologically, the elderly will

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experience a continuous aging process marked by decreased physical endurance so that they are susceptible to diseases such as stroke, diabetes mellitus, joint inflammation, headaches, etc. Meanwhile, economically and socially, many people think that the elderly are seen as a burden on life because their weakened souls cannot provide benefits to their families and society (Pedrova, 2023).

At each stage of development, humans need stakeholders as guides, educators, and even supervisors to go through these developmental tasks. The limitations of the elderly cause them to be unable to live independently. The elderly need other people to help them carry out their life activities, especially if the elderly suffer from chronic diseases that require maximum supervision (Padni et al., 2024). The emergence of degenerative diseases that occur in the elderly is individualistic. When individuals can realize and accept this, they will respond positively, and vice versa; if individuals are unable to accept and learn their condition, the response that appears is negative so that it can have an impact on their well-being. Reviewed from Erik Erikson's theory, the elderly phase is described as a phase of integrity vs. despair; past developments affect the future (Feist et al., 2018).

The success of carrying out each stage in the developmental period plays an important role in adulthood (Maree, 2018). If individuals have a past developed with optimistic hopes, they will feel satisfied in their old age. However, if the past development process is carried out negatively, then in old age, it will cause a sense of despair about their lives, so they feel that their lives are no longer meaningful (Feist et al., 2018). When older people can reach the stage of self-integrity, it means that they can evaluate and accept their lives without regret. They can take themselves, both the shortcomings and advantages of life that they experience, so that the elderly can achieve happiness and well-being, often called subjective well-being (Maulana & Rizal, 2023). On the other hand, old age is when individuals want to feel more cared for by their surroundings. He wants to enjoy his life with eternal happiness and satisfaction. Where all of that wants to be obtained from his loved ones and wants to get special attention from his family (Karni, 2018). This concept refers to the definition of subjective well-being. According to Diener (1984), individuals with high subjective well-being can be interpreted as being able to express feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and meaningfulness of life without any regret. In contrast, individuals tend to enjoy their lives with positive emotions (Diener, 1984).

Several factors influence subjective well-being in the elderly, including self-efficacy, social support, gratitude, spirituality, religiosity, social relationships, etc. This is supported by research by (Isnani & Nurchayati, 2023). This shows that the elderly have high subjective well-being because the aspects that contribute to subjective well-being have been fulfilled. One aspect that is fulfilled is increasing religiosity by participating in religious activities so that individuals have a purpose in life, enjoying their lives by doing positive things (Isnani & Nurchayati, 2023). This is in line with the opinion of Diener (2009), who stated that one of the factors that influences subjective well-being is religion and spirituality. People with a high level of religiosity tend to have a higher level of well-being and are more specific. This is because there is a religious soul and spirit, bringing them closer to God, which then contributes positively to a higher level of well-being (Diener, 2009).

In addition, the results of research findings conducted by Padni, et al. (2024) also show that gratitude influences the subjective well-being of the elderly. This is proven by providing social intervention through the BERANI (Bersyukur Atas Kehidupan Ini) program to improve subjective well-being in the elderly at PSTW Wana Seraya. The results showed an increase in posttest and pretest scores, initially 39.83, increasing to 49.83 (Padni et al., 2024). Thus, individuals who have a high level of subjective well-being tend to feel eternal happiness and satisfaction in life. This is in line with research conducted by Sugianto and Yuwono (2024) that several aspects can influence happiness in the elderly in nursing homes, including gratitude as part of happiness, social support brings happiness, adaptation creates happiness, and success helps achieve happiness. The study shows that being grateful for a healthy body condition is essential because health and happiness have a strong correlation. In addition, social support provides physical and mental comfort in life so that individuals feel cared for, appreciated, and loved by others (Sugianto & Yuwono, 2024).

On the other hand, the existence of older adults who have low subjective well-being is none other than because of feelings of loneliness. This is caused by several factors, including being left by their partner (Saragih & Soetjiningsih, 2024) and living alone because their child has left them (Mardhotillah & Aprilia, 2024). Every human being has different life experiences, so they get different meanings of subjective well-being. One of them is in the elderly. There are various factors that influence the high and low subjective well-being of older people. Thus, this systematic review analysis aims to examine several studies related to the factors that influence subjective well-being in the elderly in more depth.

Methodology

There are several stages in systematic review research. The first is planning the review. This is done by searching journals, selecting, assessing quality, extracting, synthesizing and recording reports in each process. In this study, the review planning uses the SPIDER formulation, namely sample, the phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and research type. Based on this formulation, the research question is obtained: What are the factors that influence subjective well-being in the elderly? Second, the researcher determines and designs search terms to find the correct articles so that they can answer the questions in this study. Furthermore, the researcher creates search keywords that match the terms taken. This study's search keywords are well-being, subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, late adulthood,

elderly, older adults, and the ageing population. These words are used as keywords in the Researchgate, Google Scholar, and Scopus search databases. Third, the selection process. All search results are entered into the Rayyan application to check for duplication. Furthermore, the researcher filters journals by reading the titles and abstracts that match the research study. The appropriate articles are rechecked as a whole. Of the 141 articles found, 14 articles were declared to have passed the criteria.

The article selection process can be seen in Figure 1. The limitations in this systematic review are: (a) journals that discuss factors that influence subjective well-being and/or happiness, life satisfaction, (b) The research subjects are the elderly, (c) The journals used are in English, (d). Types of quantitative and/or qualitative research, (e) The research was conducted in the last 5 years, namely 2019-2024. After the selection, the next stage is to include journals that meet the criteria in the discussion. Meanwhile, journals that do not meet the requirements, such as 1). Do not discuss subjective well-being and happiness or life satisfaction. 2). Not written in English, 3). Journals that do not describe the factors of subjective well-being and happiness and life satisfaction in the elderly 4). Articles with the type of review, proceeding, book, literature review, meta-analysis, or research whose methods need to be clearly described.

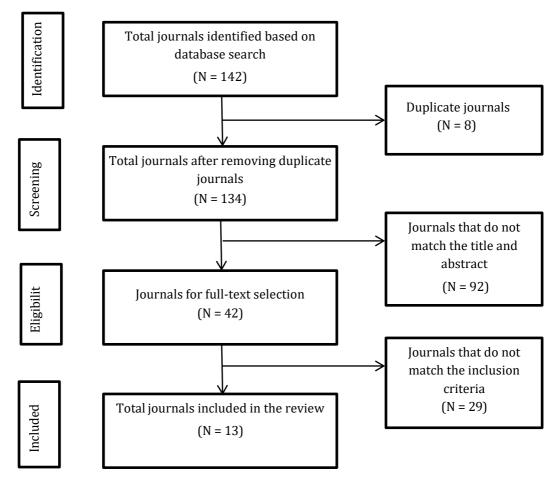


Figure 1. PRISMA Chart for Journal Selection Flow

Source: (Moher et al., 2009)

Findings/Results

Subjective well-being is often interpreted as self-evaluation of one's life with the hope of being able to develop based on that evaluation. However, there are also those who interpret subjective well-being as satisfaction and meaningfulness of life expressed through happiness. With a high level of subjective well-being, individuals can evaluate themselves to develop better than before, so they are able to interpret life positively without any self-regret. In addition, individuals can regulate emotions and deal with problems well. Likewise, low subjective well-being can fill them with negative feelings (Dewi & Nasywa, 2019). Therefore, subjective well-being plays an important role for every individual, especially from adolescence to late adulthood. This is because adolescence is the peak of the individual's search for identity, which then goes through each phase until late adulthood. During late adulthood, individuals will be at a point of self-integrity versus despair. So, in old age, individuals will evaluate themselves with hope; positive feelings are more dominant than negative feelings. Several experts define subjective well-being.

According to Diener (2009), subjective well-being has three definitions. First, subjective well-being is not a subjective statement but rather some causal desire that everyone wants to have. Second, subjective well-being is a comprehensive assessment of an individual's life with several criteria. Third, subjective well-being is used in everyday conversations where positive feelings outweigh negative feelings (Diener, 2009). According to Eddington and Shuman (2005) the term subjective well-being is the same as the term happiness in positive psychology studies. This condition refers to an individual's evaluation of their life based on two assessments, namely cognitive and affective assessments (Eddington & Shuman, 2005; Zhang et al., 2022). The affective dimension is related to attitudes, character, behaviour, emotions, and values. This is represented by the emotional experience that is felt. While the cognitive dimension is a form of evaluation of life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 2013; Moore, 2019).

According to Diener (1984) subjective well-being is an individual's evaluation of their life. The review has two meanings: cognitive evaluation, such as life satisfaction, and emotional assessment, in the form of the number of frequencies experienced by individuals about positive affects, namely pleasant feelings, and adverse affects, namely unpleasant feelings (Diener, 1984). Diener also explained that individuals who have high subjective well-being are individuals who experience life satisfaction, feel positive emotions, are happy, and rarely show negative emotions. Likewise, individuals with low subjective well-being tend to be dissatisfied with their lives and often experience negative emotions (Diener et al., 1999). Meanwhile, according to Compton (2005), subjective well-being is divided into two main variables, namely happiness and life satisfaction. He explained that happiness is related to the individual's emotional state and how the individual feels in his life. While life satisfaction is associated with a global assessment of the individual's ability to accept his life (Compton, 2005; Compton & Hoffman, 2019). Subjective well-being is one of the predictors of life success, especially in the elderly. Individuals with high levels of subjective well-being show good life performance and social relationships (Pavot & Diener, 2004). Several factors cause the high and low subjective well-being. The following are some factors that can affect subjective well-being in the elderly based on a systematic review analysis.

No	Researcher	Subject	Factors Influencing	Findings
1	(Gil-Lacruz et al., 2019)	1699 Seniors 61-80 years in Chile, Mexico and Spain	Volunteering	• Has a stronger impact on life satisfaction in men than women, becomes healthier, has a better life expectancy
2	(Taufik et al., 2021)	310 elderly >60 years in Indonesia	 Family support Participation in religious activities Physical health 	• Elderly people who attend religious studies and retired elderly have higher happiness
3	(Sun, 2023)	4,372 elderly people > 60 years in Tiongkok	Income satisfactionHealth	 Rich elderly people have higher mental health status than poor elderly people Health has an impact on elderly happiness
4		206 elderly people > 60 years in the Ñuble region (south- central Chile)	 Spirituality Religiosity	 Spirituality and religiosity increase elderly happiness, reduce feelings of loneliness
5	(Ren, 2023)	9 Elderly Ages 74-95 in China and Denmark	 Positive and negative emotional experiences Family harmony	• Past, present, or future family member relationships improve quality of life
6	(Sepúlveda- Aravena et al., 2021)	10 elderly aged 60-75 years in the area Araucanía	 Social support Economic income Organizational participation 	 Increases happiness and life satisfaction
7	(Zhang et al., 2022)	3.266 elderly >60 years in Shanxi, China	Sleep qualitySocial support	 Sleep quality has a direct effect on elderly well-being Social support reduces anxiety
8	(Shin & Park, 2022)	207 elderly people aged 60-69 in South Korea	Social support	• Influences happiness, strengthens self- esteem, reduces symptoms of depression and loneliness
9	(Khodarahimi et al., 2021)	120 elderly in Shiraz city, Iran	 Spirituality Tolerance of ambiguity	 elps the elderly to tolerate high levels of anxiety in order to achieve satisfaction and happiness
10	(Arias-Monsalve et al., 2022)	252 rural elderly aged 60-94 years in Colombia	 Economic status Health Social support Education 	 Elderly people who have graduated from elementary school, are chronically ill, tend to have low happiness and life satisfaction Income levels in rural elderly people do not affect happiness

Table 1. List of Factors That Influence Subjective Well-Being in the Elderly

No Researcher	Subject	Factors Influencing	Findings
(Lara et al.,		 Social support 	 Improves psychological health and well-
11 2020)	154 elderly	 Optimism 	being, happiness, how long they will
	aged 65-96 years	 Self-efficacy 	survive, life expectancy
(Viklund &	1,828 elderly	 Internet use 	
12 Forsman, 2022)	(65-85 years) in		 increases the meaning of life
	Sweden and Finland		
(Carandang et 13 al., 2020)	1,021 elderly Age >60 years in the Philippines	 Psychological resilience Social support Self-health Marital Status Education 	 Improves quality and satisfaction of life Divorced elderly people (women) tend to experience stress from losing life Uneducated elderly (men) experience dissatisfaction with life

Table 1. Continued

Conclusion

Based on the table, various factors can affect subjective well-being in the elderly. Each factor found can be grouped into several themes, including demographic, physiological, psychological, and behavioural or social activity factors.

First, subjective well-being in the elderly is influenced by demographic factors, including educational status, marital status, income/economic status, and different geographical locations of residence. This is indicated by older adults living in rural and urban areas. The study's results revealed that economic status does not correlate with the level of happiness in the elderly living in rural areas. Older adults living in rural areas tend to feel happy if they have good health conditions (Arias-Monsalve et al., 2022). In contrast, the elderly who live in cities with rich lives will significantly impact their mental health and happiness (Sun, 2023). Marital status is also one of the main factors that can affect the level of subjective wellbeing of individuals. The results of the study showed that women who separated would lose intimate relationships that they thought could help them deal with the pressures of life (Carandang et al., 2020). So that the positive impact of marriage can increase individual life satisfaction (Gibney et al., 2017).

Second, influenced social behaviour/activities, namely volunteering, have an impact on the health and life satisfaction of the elderly. However, different types of social activities have different impacts on male and female elderly. Volunteers related to social care will positively impact male life satisfaction, while volunteers in religious activities have a positive effect on male and female life satisfaction. Volunteering also provides both health benefits and life expectancy (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2019). In addition, older adults who participate in organizations such as religious activities tend to feel a high level of happiness of 23.28% (Sepúlveda-Aravena et al., 2021; Taufik et al., 2021).

Third, the subjective well-being of the elderly is influenced by physiological factors, such as health and sleep quality in the elderly. The results of a study by Zhang et al., (2022) showed that sleep quality and negative emotions are related to individual subjective well-being. Poor sleep quality has an impact on anxiety and depression, which triggers a decline in physical and psychological health in the elderly (Arias-Monsalve et al., 2022). Physical health in the elderly will affect happiness, and older adults who are sick will experience life stress. This is different from the condition of healthy older adults who tend to be able to do various desired physical and social activities so that they feel happy and have high life satisfaction (Carandang et al., 2020; Sun, 2023; Taufik et al., 2021).

Fourth, psychological factors include social support from the family, which has an influence of 23.65% on the happiness of the elderly, where the elderly feel appreciated and cared for by family members to improve their health. Family support is a great hope for the elderly (Lara et al., 2020; Taufik et al., 2021). An older adult, when often visited by his family members, will improve his mood, triggering feelings of joy and happiness. That way, a harmonious relationship in a family can also improve the quality of life of the elderly (Ren, 2023). In addition to impacting happiness, social support can also strengthen self-esteem, reduce symptoms of depression, and reduce loneliness (Shin & Park, 2022).

Spirituality and religiosity also positively impact the happiness of the elderly, even being a good predictor for improving the quality of life and social and emotional well-being in individuals (Saldías-Ortega & Moyano-Díaz, 2023). With a high level of religiosity and spirituality, the elderly become more surrendered to God's will, the elderly believe that God will give them the best. This attitude tends to be high in optimism and self-efficacy in the elderly, thereby increasing psychological well-being and happiness and providing hope for life (Lara et al., 2020). However, having positive and negative emotional experiences in the past can affect the quality of life that is felt. Older adults who have experienced difficulties in life tend to have a positive appreciation of happiness and assessment of life in their elderly years (Ren, 2023).

In addition, previous studies have found that spirituality and tolerance of ambiguity can increase happiness in the elderly by 60%. The study shows that spirituality can help the elderly tolerate high levels of anxiety caused by various sources of uncertainty in their lives. The elderly tolerate their worries by strengthening positive beliefs in their God, which can

affect satisfaction and happiness in their lives (Khodarahimi et al., 2021). Older adults using the internet can affect their level of well-being. Where the use of the internet provides opportunities for the elderly to explore and facilitate involvement in meaningful activities so that it can create feelings of pleasure that trigger increased happiness and meaningfulness of life in the elderly (Carandang et al., 2020).

When viewed from the overall analysis results, psychological factors play a significant role that can affect subjective wellbeing in the elderly. Social support plays an important role in a person's psychological resilience, both physically and mentally. Research shows that the existence of social support can strengthen self-esteem and reduce loneliness (Shin & Park, 2022). So it is likely that if an older adult lives or maintains life alone, they tend to have low subjective well-being. This is supported by previous research findings that revealed that living alone at home without the presence of children or other relatives as carers can trigger negative feelings that impact the loss of well-being/life satisfaction (Isnani & Nurchayati, 2023).

The existence of differences in gender and local culture can also affect a person's subjective well-being. This aligns with the research findings on older women in Japan, who tend to be significantly happier when living alone. Meanwhile, in Japan, it significantly negatively impacts the subjective well-being of older men (Matsuura & Ma, 2022). In addition, society usually considers other things detrimental to older people but have a positive impact on them. What is meant is the use of the internet, which is positively correlated with the subjective well-being of the elderly. The output can provide opportunities for the elderly to explore and facilitate involvement in meaningful activities, which can increase their subjective well-being. This creates a feeling of pleasure that triggers increased happiness and meaningfulness of life in the elderly. However, supervision is still needed occasionally so that individuals do not experience fatal errors that can trigger a decrease in subjective well-being. Thus, the determinant of high and low subjective well-being lies with the individual himself, with stimulation from several related factors as supporters of subjective well-being in elderly individuals.

Then, subjective well-being plays an important role for every individual, especially from adolescence to old age. This is because adolescence is the peak of the individual's search for identity, which goes through each phase until late adulthood (elderly). During late adulthood, individuals will be at the point of self-integrity versus despair. So that in old age, individuals will evaluate the life they live. The existence of a high level of subjective well-being will give rise to more positive emotions than negative emotions. In this case, the elderly can feel the meaning and satisfaction of life, spread positive things, and get a sense of security and happiness. Based on the results of the systematic review analysis show that various factors influence subjective well-being in the elderly. These factors include volunteer activities, economic income, family support, participation in both social and religious activities, physical health, income satisfaction, spirituality and religiosity, positive experiences and emotions, sleep quality, self-efficacy, and internet use. The findings of this systematic review are expected to make it easier for readers and subsequent writers to find out what factors can improve and what factors need to be avoided so that subjective well-being can be achieved in elderly individuals.

The results of this systematic review also provide recommendations for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to conduct more profound studies on subjective well-being. As the era develops, it would be better if this science continued to grow every time with some necessary improvements.

Limitations of this study include only 13 international journals, which may cover a partial range of factors influencing subjective well-being in older adults across cultural and geographic contexts. This study only included articles published within the last 5 years, so it may not reflect older studies that could provide additional insights. Subjective well-being can be influenced by situational changes that occur over time, which cannot always be measured in cross-sectional studies.

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