



REVIEW ARTICLE


Life satisfaction: a sustainable perspective in old age-physical and mental health

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ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction is a subjective concept that reflects individuals' overall evaluation of their life. It is closely associated with the physical and mental health of older adults. The sustainability of life satisfaction among the elderly is important for both individual happiness and societal well-being for public health. This literature study aims to provide a sustainable perspective by examining the factors influencing life satisfaction in old age through both physical and mental dimensions. This study, designed as a literature review, was prepared by scanning studies published in the last five years (2021-2025) in PubMed, Scopus and Science Direct databases. Older adults with high life satisfaction tend to form healthier relationships with their surroundings, access health services more consciously, and interact more actively with society. In this context, addressing life satisfaction in old age from a physical and mental health perspective contributes to achieving sustainable well-being at both the individual and societal levels. The literature demonstrates that life satisfaction in older adults is directly related to their physical and mental health status. The majority of participants reported that the presence of chronic diseases, mobility limitations, and loss of independence in daily activities negatively affected their life satisfaction. In terms of mental health, symptoms of depression, social isolation, and feelings of loneliness emerge as significant determinants of reduced life satisfaction. The review found that protective factors such as regular health check-ups, an active lifestyle, the presence of social support systems, and support for psychological well-being significantly enhance life satisfaction. Additionally, developing a positive attitude towards aging and having meaningful life goals play a vital role in ensuring sustainable life satisfaction. Based on the literature review, developing policies, practices, and supportive services aimed at improving life satisfaction in older adults is of great importance for promoting healthy and active aging.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, sustainability, elderly health, mental health, physical health, public health

INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is a subjective indicator of happiness that reflects individuals' evaluation of their life and constitutes a significant determinant of quality of life among older adults.^(1,2) With the global increase in the elderly population, the

development of sustainable approaches to support the mental health and life satisfaction of older individuals has become increasingly critical.⁽³⁾ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), healthy aging is not merely the absence of disease, but rather the attainment of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.⁽⁴⁾

Aging is a natural process of life that holistically affects individuals across physical, cognitive, and emotional domains.⁽⁵⁾ During this period, life satisfaction not only expresses a general sense of contentment with life but also serves as a key indicator of a healthy aging process.⁽⁶⁾ While physical health is vital for enabling older individuals to maintain independence in daily living, mental health is directly linked to their sense of value, peace, and emotional balance.^(7,8) The sustainability of life satisfaction in old age therefore requires the harmonious and supportive management of these two fundamental components.⁽⁸⁾

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the proportion of individuals aged 65 and above has exceeded 10%.⁽⁹⁾ This demographic shift has made enhancing life satisfaction among the elderly a foundational element of sustainable social policy.⁽³⁾ However, old age is often accompanied by various challenges such as physical health problems, loneliness, depression, chronic diseases, social isolation, and economic

insecurity.⁽¹⁰⁾ Changing the healthcare needs of an aging population is a public health challenge. In connection with this concept, this review explores the physical and mental health components that affect life satisfaction among older adults and proposes approaches to establish a sustainable aging perspective.

METHODS

In this review, we searched the literature for articles on life satisfaction published in English between 2021 and 2025. Relevant articles were retrieved from PubMed, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar using the keywords: "life satisfaction" "physical health," "mental health," "chronic disease," and "depression". The search initially yielded 130 articles. After removing duplicates, inaccessible full texts, and articles not relevant to the review objectives, 76 articles were excluded. A total of 54 articles were selected for analysis and synthesis (as shown in Figure 1).

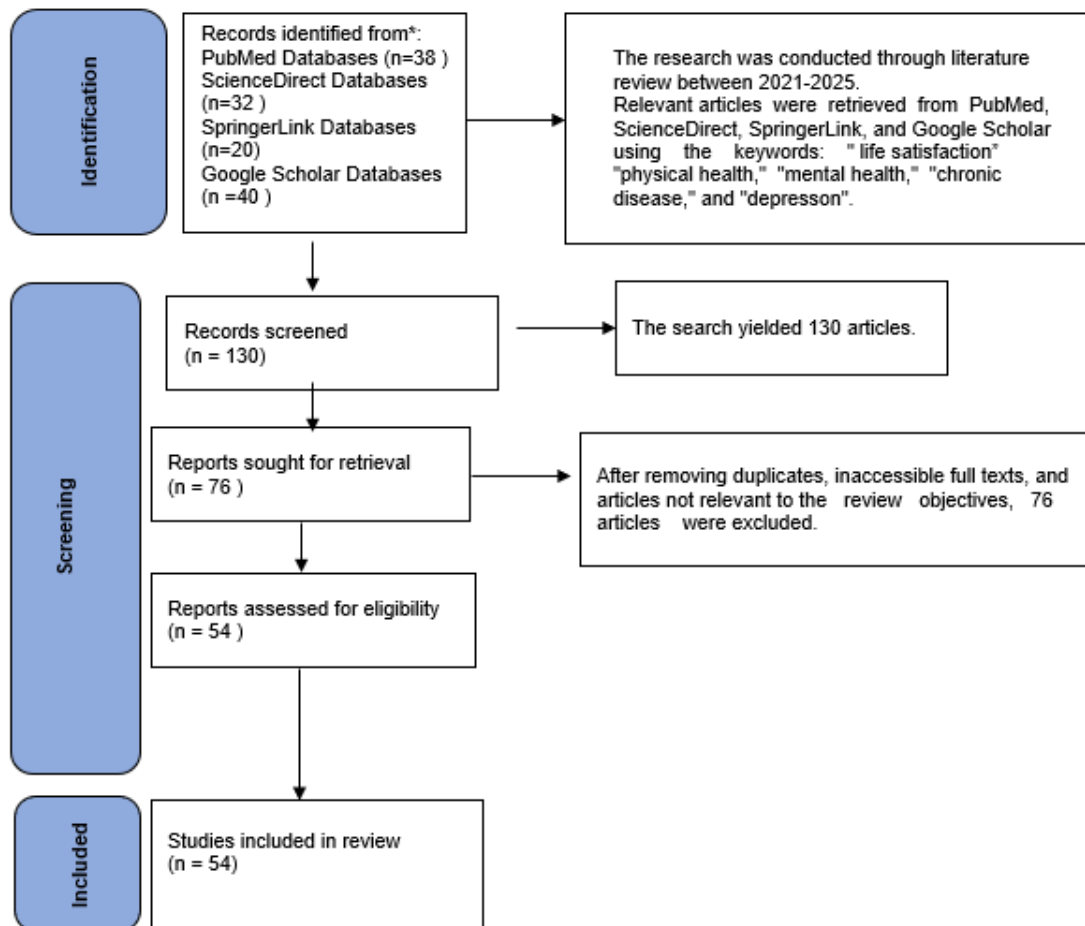


Figure 1. Identification of studies via databases and registers

LIFE SATISFACTION AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

Life satisfaction is a multidimensional concept. There are two main aspects that significantly influence life satisfaction in older adults: physical and mental health.⁽¹¹⁾ Negative effects stemming from physical and mental health can also impact social well-being, leading elderly individuals to face a range of associated problems.

Physical health and life satisfaction

Physical health is one of the most fundamental elements determining an individual's overall quality of life and life satisfaction.⁽⁷⁾ The aging process marks a period during which physical health problems become more prevalent and physical capacity begins to decline.⁽¹²⁾ At the same time, this process is a critical factor influencing individuals' satisfaction with life and general mental well-being.⁽¹¹⁾ The preservation and improvement of physical health can enhance the quality of life and positively affect life satisfaction among older adults.⁽¹³⁾ In particular, physical health refers to the capacity of individuals to independently carry out daily living activities.⁽⁴⁾ The high prevalence of chronic diseases among older adults is one of the primary reasons negatively affecting physical health. Chronic conditions and mobility limitations can adversely impact both physical and psychological well-being.⁽¹⁴⁾ Mobility restrictions can also have a direct negative effect on social participation and independence in elderly individuals.⁽¹⁵⁾ Moreover, the inability to perform daily tasks may lead to decreased life satisfaction and an increased risk of depression.⁽¹⁶⁾ Reduced mobility is also associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases. Studies have shown that chronic health problems diminish life satisfaction and negatively impact mental health.⁽¹⁷⁾ Therefore, physical health should be addressed not only from an individual perspective but also within a societal context.⁽¹⁸⁾ Healthy aging enables individuals to remain physically and mentally active and to continue contributing to society.⁽¹⁹⁾

The relationship between life satisfaction and physical health

Life satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that expresses how well an individual feels physically, mentally, and socially.⁽²⁰⁾ In older adults, life satisfaction is directly affected by

health status and is considered a key indicator of well-being.⁽²¹⁾ The relationship between physical health and life satisfaction can be explained as follows: (i) functional independence: good physical health enables older adults to perform daily activities independently. For example, being able to eat, dress, or go out without assistance enhances self-confidence and positively influences life satisfaction.^(22,23) (ii) pain management: physical health problems in older adults are often associated with chronic pain, which negatively affects both physical and mental health.⁽²⁴⁾ effective pain management programs and healthcare services can improve life satisfaction among elderly individuals.⁽²⁵⁾ (iii) regular physical activity: research shows that regular physical activity supports both physical health and psychological well-being.^(26,27) Activities such as walking, yoga, or light exercise programs help maintain muscle strength, reduce stress levels, and increase overall satisfaction with life.⁽²⁸⁻³⁰⁾

Factors supporting physical health

Several factors play a role in maintaining the physical health of older adults and enhancing their quality of life: (i) healthy nutrition: a balanced and adequate diet is critically important in preventing chronic diseases among older individuals.⁽³¹⁾ In particular, healthy dietary patterns such as the Mediterranean diet have been shown to improve quality of life in the elderly.^(32,33) (ii) regular medical check-ups: the early diagnosis and effective management of health problems significantly improve physical health and enhance the quality of life in older adults.⁽³⁴⁾ (iii) promotion of physical activity: exercise supports musculoskeletal health and facilitates the ability of individuals to perform daily living activities independently.⁽²⁶⁾ For example, group exercise programs designed for older adults provide both physical and social benefits.⁽²⁷⁾ (iv) improving sleep quality: disruption in sleep patterns negatively affects both the physical and mental health of older adults.⁽³⁵⁾ Attention to sleep hygiene is considered a key determinant of life quality and holds significant importance for elderly health.⁽³⁶⁾

Societal approaches to sustainability in physical health

The sustainability of physical health in older adults requires not only individual efforts but also

the implementation of supportive societal mechanisms.⁽²⁷⁾ In this context, sustainable policies aimed at enhancing the quality of life among older individuals can be summarized as follows: (i) age-friendly cities and environmental design: designing age-friendly living spaces such as accessible sidewalks, parks, and physical activity areas promotes mobility in older adults while also enhancing their social participation.⁽³⁷⁾ (ii) community-based health services: accessibility to local health services is of critical importance for maintaining and improving the health status of older individuals. Home healthcare services, mobile clinics, and community centers offer supportive solutions in this regard.⁽³⁸⁾ (iii) volunteer and social support programs: volunteer programs that encourage regular physical activity among the elderly contribute to the maintenance of their physical health.⁽³⁹⁾

Mental health and life satisfaction

In terms of sustaining life satisfaction, psychological well-being and emotional resilience are critically important for the mental health of older adults.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Psychological well-being refers to an individual's capacity to evaluate life positively, maintain emotional balance, and experience a sense of meaning.⁽⁴¹⁾ Emotional resilience, on the other hand, is the ability to adapt to stress, adversity, or life changes. The ability of older adults to adapt to the biological, social, and environmental transitions that accompany aging is a significant determinant of both their mental health and life satisfaction.^(41,42)

The relationship between life satisfaction and mental health

Mental well-being encompasses older adults' capacity to perceive their lives positively. Therefore, the psychological well-being process expected of older individuals is grounded in key components of mental health.^(41,42) (i) self-acceptance: this refers to the ability to evaluate one's life and past in a positive light. One of the most essential factors supporting life satisfaction among older adults is their ability to accept themselves as they are.⁽⁴³⁾ Particularly in the face of failures and losses, the ability to practice self-forgiveness positively influences psychological well-being.⁽⁴⁴⁾ (ii) search for purpose and meaning: Finding meaning in life is a central determinant of life satisfaction for older adults. This sense of purpose can be supported through volunteering,

spending time with family, or engaging in religious activities. Feeling that life has meaning enhances psychological well-being.⁽⁴¹⁾ (iii) environmental mastery: environmental mastery refers to the ability to effectively control one's surroundings and manage one's life. The ability of older adults to maintain independence in daily living supports their psychological well-being.^(45,46) (iv) personal growth: being open to learning contributes to enjoyment in life among older individuals. Activities such as acquiring new hobbies or learning a new language enhance mental capacity and support overall well-being.⁽⁴⁷⁾ (v) autonomy: the ability to make independent decisions increases self-respect among older adults. Preserving a sense of autonomy is essential for psychological well-being.⁽⁴⁸⁾ (vi) positive relationships: strong social bonds help individuals feel valued. Positive relationships with family, friends, and the broader community strengthen the mental health of older adults.^(49,50)

Emotional resilience refers to the ability to adapt and continue life in the face of challenges.⁽⁴²⁾ For older adults, coping with stressors such as retirement, health problems, the loss of a spouse, or the shrinking of social circles highlights the importance of resilience.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Therefore, practices such as mindfulness and meditation are essential tools for protecting mental health.⁽⁵¹⁾ Additionally, developing a positive perspective helps older individuals to better cope with life's challenges.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Managing social support is another key factor in coping with losses that negatively affect mental health. High-quality relationships with family and friends, as sources of support, foster a sense of safety, peace, and enhanced life satisfaction, not only during times of loss but also in the normal flow of daily life.⁽⁴¹⁾

Factors supporting mental health

To promote the mental health of older adults, a range of individual and societal-level factors must be ensured: (i) psychological counseling and therapy services: therapy services tailored to older adults can effectively address issues such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Cognitive behavioral therapy, in particular, helps improve mental health by changing negative thought patterns.⁽⁴⁷⁾ (ii) social participation and volunteering: taking on active roles in society helps older individuals feel valued.⁽⁴³⁾ Participating in volunteer work or community events enhances both social and emotional well-being.⁽⁵²⁾ (iii) religious and spiritual activities:

religious or spiritual practices can assist individuals in coping with stress. Engaging in activities aligned with personal beliefs supports a sense of meaning and fulfillment in life.⁽⁵³⁾ (iv) education and awareness programs: raising awareness among older adults on topics such as stress management, mindfulness, and self-compassion helps strengthen psychological resilience.⁽⁵¹⁾ (v) encouragement of hobbies and interests: hobbies such as art, music, gardening, or crafts reduce stress and support mental well-being.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Societal approaches to sustainability in mental health

Mental health sustainability cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone; societal-level initiatives are also essential: (i) age-friendly psychological support programs: local governments and healthcare institutions should offer free psychological support services to older adults. Such services help reduce stress and anxiety levels.^(8,29) (ii) community centers and social spaces: community centers that allow older adults to socialize reduce feelings of loneliness and strengthen emotional connections.⁽⁴⁾ (iii) family education: educational programs for family members of older adults help them understand psychological needs and provide better support.⁽⁴¹⁾

CONCLUSION

Physical and mental health play a pivotal role in life satisfaction among older individuals. The sustainability of these two factors not only ensures individual well-being but also enhances societal welfare and, by extension, social health. Access to healthcare services, the promotion of physical activity, and the development of livable environments for older adults are critical to achieving these goals. Furthermore, supporting mental health at both the individual and societal levels helps older adults feel meaningful, valued, and empowered. Psychological resilience mechanisms shaped through community support not only enhance individual well-being but also strengthen social solidarity. Developing inclusive, compassionate, and sustainable policies for older adults by families, communities, and health systems is fundamental to increasing life satisfaction. Thus, old age can be regarded not as an end, but as a meaningful, productive, and healthy phase of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare there is no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

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The data are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Declaration the Use of AI in Scientific Writing

In this study, OpenAI ChatGPT was used to improve the language and fluency of the text.

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