

Does ageing alter the contribution of health to subjective well-being?

Clémence Bussière¹, Nicolas Sirven², Philippe Tessier^{3,*}

1. LEDi (EA7467), Université de Bourgogne

2. LIRAES (EA 4470) Université Paris Descartes & IRDES, Paris.

3. SPHERE (UMR INSERM 1246), Université de Nantes, Université de Tours

Abstract

This paper addresses a largely understudied issue which relates to how ageing may change how much health matters for Subjective Well-Being (SWB). Using panel data from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) concerning adults from 10 European countries aged 50 and above, we estimated fixed-effects models regressing measures of cognitive (life satisfaction), affective (positive and negative) and eudaimonic well-being (purpose, meaning and accomplishment in life) on predicted self-reported health. The estimated models include interaction terms combining health and age to capture potential changes in the contribution of health to SWB as one gets older. Our findings confirm that health is a significant positive determinant of SWB, whether evaluative, affective or eudaimonic. Yet, they also show that the value of health changes with age and, more importantly, that the changes run in opposite directions depending on the measure of SWB used. Whilst changes concerning life satisfaction and negative affectivity evoke adaptation to a progressively declining health, since the association between SWB and health weakens with age, on the contrary ageing substantially increases the importance of health for eudaimonic well-being and positive affectivity. These findings point out the problem of using mean estimations over the entire lifespan to determine the importance of health to individual well-being. They also caution against the use of the various forms of SWB interchangeably even when they share the same determinants. Our results thus highlight the need to further explore the dynamics of the relationship between health and SWB to identify ways to promote good ageing.

Keywords: health, subjective well-being, ageing, adaptation

* corresponding author: philippe.tessier@univ-nantes.fr