

With age comes a sense of peace and calm, study shows

Aging brings a sense of peace and calm, according to a new study from the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin. Starting at about age 60, participants reported more feelings of ease and contentment than their younger counterparts.

Catherine Ross and John Mirowsky, professors of sociology, have published the findings in “Age and the Balance of Emotions” in the May 19 issue of *Social Science and Medicine*. The research was funded in part by the National Institute on Aging.

The findings reveal aging is associated with more positive than negative emotions, and more passive than active emotions, Ross said.

Previous research on emotions associated with aging focused on negative emotions, such as depression. However, a second dimension underlying emotions is an active versus passive dimension, which is less studied, but may be important in explaining how emotions shift as people age, according to the researchers.

“The passive/positive combination reveals that contentment, calm and ease are some of the most common emotions people feel as they age,” Ross said. “Emotions that are both active and negative, such as anxiety and anger, are especially unlikely among the elderly.”

The study examined 1,450 responses to the 1996 U.S. General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, which included English-speaking people aged 18 and older. The gender distribution of the sample was 56 percent female and 44 percent male, and the racial distribution was 81 percent white, 14 percent African American and 5 percent other races.

Participants responded to statements such as “On how many days in the past seven days have you...felt that you couldn’t shake the blues, felt sad, felt lonely, felt anxious and tense, felt worried, felt so restless that you couldn’t sit long in a chair, felt angry at someone, felt mad at someone, felt outraged at something somebody had done, felt calm, felt at ease, felt contented, felt happy, felt overjoyed by something, felt excited about or interested in something, felt proud, felt embarrassed, felt ashamed.”

The researchers then grouped the emotions in four categories: active, passive, positive and negative.

Secondary findings reveal women had more negative than positive emotions, and more passive than active emotions than men. Also, participants with higher income and education levels had significantly more positive emotions than those with lower income and education levels.

Source: University of Texas at Austin

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