

Resilience in older people

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Successful aging is typically defined as freedom from chronic disease and disability, as well as high physical and mental functioning. Traditionally, in Western cultures, older age has been viewed negatively as a time of frailty, disability, declining function, and greater physical and mental limitations. However, many older adults experience high wellbeing and quality of life, low stress, recovery from adversities, and consider themselves to be aging successfully despite the onset of chronic conditions. Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. It means, "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.

In some studies, adults age 85 and older appear to have the same or greater capacity for resilience as those who are younger, suggesting that resilience may also support longevity. Several common characteristics of resilience among older adults have been identified. High resilience later in life can help older adults to achieve improved quality of life, better mental health, and overall self-perceived successful aging, despite the adversities they may face. Psychological outcomes of high resilience include greater happiness, wellbeing, and satisfaction with life; improved resistance to stress; and lower rates of depression. Positive physical outcomes include ADL independence, increased longevity, lower mortality risk, and faster cardiovascular recovery.

Achieving the optimal outcomes tied to high resilience may require consideration of the unique adversities common to later life. The adversities that older adults face vary in number, severity, and significance, from changes in daily routine to loss of a spouse. Research suggests that an accumulation of adversities throughout life may offer opportunities for resilience, build confidence in meeting challenges, and thus improve outcomes later in life.

In this lecture characteristics and a model of resilience in older people, with points of action for occupational therapy interventions, will be presented.