

THE EFFECT OF AGE ON MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Stefan Koehn, Central Queensland University

Brenda Happell, Central Queensland University

Lorna Moxham, Central Queensland University

Trudy Dwyer, Central Queensland University

Toni McLean, Central Queensland University

INTRODUCTION

Age can have an important impact on how people perceive their mental and physical health. A limited amount of research has been conducted to test health differences between age groups (Resnick, 2003). The aim of this study was to test age-related effects on mental and physical health.

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 1163 participants, aged between 18 and 93 ($M = 50.96$; $SD = 15.95$). Males ($n = 590$) and females ($n = 573$) were equally represented.

Procedure

Participants were contacted through phone interviews. In the interview participants were asked about their age, as well as mental and physical health. Participants were grouped into age categories of 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65 and older.

Measures

The SF-12 consists of two main dimensions, assessing mental and physical health. Each dimension incorporates four scales and measured by one or two items. Ware, Kosinski, and Keller (1996) found acceptable test-retest reliability scores between .76 and .89 for both subscales.

RESULTS

Descriptive analysis showed that younger age groups (1 to 3) had a similar mean score for mental and physical health, ranging between 50 and 51. Regarding mental health, the higher the age the higher the mean score for mental health (up to $m=55.44$), whereas the physical health mean score decreased with age ($M = 44.14$). Using multivariate analysis, differences in means across age groups were statistically significant for mental health, $F(5, 1162) = 10.51$, $p < .001$, and physical health, $F(5, 1162) = 14.83$, $p < .001$, measurements. Post-hoc Scheffé

tests confirmed significant differences mainly between Age Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4, and Age Group 6.

Table 1: Central tendencies for age groups on mental and physical health

Age Groups	Mental Health		Physical Health	
	M	SD	M	SD
1 (<i>n</i> = 69)	51.54	8.85	51.00	6.58
2 (<i>n</i> = 118)	51.39	8.29	51.08	6.99
3 (<i>n</i> = 216)	51.26	7.93	50.50	8.13
4 (<i>n</i> = 263)	52.02	7.87	49.07	9.60
5 (<i>n</i> = 253)	54.12	7.25	47.18	11.47
6 (<i>n</i> = 244)	55.44	7.87	44.14	11.38

CONCLUSION

The results indicated that older participants rated their mental health significantly higher than younger participants. On the other hand, there was a tendency for younger participants to report their physical higher than older participants. This suggests the possibility that both factors may develop independently from age. Further studies are necessary to determine whether the relationship between age and mental and physical health is independent, reciprocal, or mediated by other demographic or situational factors, such as gender and socio-economic status.

REFERENCES

- Resnick, B. (2003). Health promotion practices of older adults: Model testing. *Public Health Nursing, 20*, 491–496.
- Ware, J. E., Kosinski, M. A., & Keller, S. D. (1996). A 12-item short form health survey (SF-12): Construction of scales and preliminary test of reliability and validity. *Medical Care, 32*, 220–233.