

Outgoing people lead happier lives

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Research from the University of Southampton has shown that young adults, who are more outgoing or more emotionally stable, are happier in later life than their more introverted or less emotionally stable peers.

In the study, published in the *Journal of Research in Personality*, Dr Catharine Gale from the Medical Research Council's Lifecourse Epidemiology Unit, University of Southampton and a team from the University of Edinburgh and University College London, examined the effects of [neuroticism](#) and [extraversion](#) at ages 16 and 26 years on mental wellbeing and life satisfaction at age 60 to 64 and explored the mediating roles of psychological and physical health.

They found that personality dispositions by the time of [early adulthood](#) have an enduring influence on well-being decades later.

Dr Gale, Reader in Epidemiology, comments: "Few studies have examined the long-term influence of [personality traits](#) in youth on happiness and life satisfaction later in life. We found that extroversion in youth had direct, positive effects on wellbeing and life satisfaction in later life. Neuroticism, in contrast, had a negative impact, largely because it tends to make people more susceptible to feelings of [anxiety and depression](#) and to physical health problems. "

The study examined data on 4,583 people who are members of the National Survey for Health and Development, conducted by the Medical Research Council. All were born in 1946; they completed a short personality inventory at age 16, and again at age 26.

Extroversion was assessed by questions about their sociability, energy, and activity orientation. Neuroticism was assessed by questions about their emotional stability, mood, and distractibility.

Decades later, when the participants were 60 to 64-years-old, 2,529 of them answered a series of questions measuring well-being and their level of satisfaction with life. They also reported on their mental and physical health. Their answers point to a distinct pattern.

Specifically, greater extroversion, as assessed in young adulthood, was directly associated with higher scores for well-being and for satisfaction with life. Neuroticism, in contrast, predicted poorer levels of wellbeing, but it did so indirectly. People higher in neuroticism as young adults were more susceptible to psychological distress later in life and to a lesser extent, poorer physical health.

Dr Gale adds: "Understanding what determines how happy people feel in later life is of particular interest because there is good evidence that happier people tend to live longer. In this study we found that levels of neuroticism and extraversion measured over 40 years earlier were strongly predictive of well-being and [life satisfaction](#) in older men and women. Personality in youth appears to have an enduring influence on happiness decades later."

More information: www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0092656613000901

Provided by University of Southampton

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