

Certain personality traits and satisfaction linked throughout adult lifespan

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Certain personality traits are associated with satisfaction in life, and despite the changes people may experience in social roles and responsibilities over the course of their adult lives, that association is

stable regardless of age, according to research published by the American Psychological Association in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

"Many studies have shown that people with certain personality profiles are more satisfied with their life than others. Yet, it had not been extensively studied whether this holds true across the lifespan. For example, extraverted—that is sociable, talkative—people might be particularly happy in young adulthood, when they typically are forming new social relationships," said study co-author Gabriel Olaru, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Tilburg University. "We thus wanted to examine if some personality traits are more or less relevant to life, social and work [satisfaction](#) in specific life phases."

To determine how the relationship between personality traits and life satisfaction changes over time, researchers analyzed data collected from 2008 to 2019 by the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel survey, a nationally representative survey of households in the Netherlands. Over 11 years, 9,110 Dutch participants ranging from 16 to 95 years old at the time of the first survey answered multiple questionnaires to assess their Big Five personality traits—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and [emotional stability](#)/neuroticism—and their satisfaction with their [social connections](#) and their life overall. Only the 5,928 participants who were employed at the time of the survey also answered questions about their satisfaction with their work lives.

The researchers found that most of the relationships between personality traits and satisfaction remained the same across the adult lifespan, and that emotional stability was the trait most strongly associated with people's satisfaction with their life, social connections and career.

"Our findings show that—despite differences in life challenges and

[social roles](#)—personality traits are relevant for our satisfaction with life, work and social contacts across young, middle and older adulthood," said Manon van Scheppingen, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Tilburg University and another co-author on the study. "The personality traits remained equally relevant across the adult lifespan, or became even more interconnected in some cases for work satisfaction."

The researchers also found that different personality traits were related to people's satisfaction with their social lives and careers—most notably conscientiousness for work satisfaction, and extraversion and agreeableness for social satisfaction. People who saw increases in these traits across time also reported increases in their life, social and work satisfaction.

People's satisfaction with their work was the most affected by differences in age. As participants in the study aged, the relationship between career satisfaction and emotional stability grew moderately stronger.

Despite a weaker correlation between openness and life satisfaction overall, the researchers found that people who increased in openness also increased in life satisfaction across the 11 years measured by the LISS survey. This relationship may be explained by indirect processes, according to the researchers.

"Emotional stability likely shows a strong link with global and domain-specific satisfaction because this trait colors people's general view of the world," Olaru said.

"A good example of how [personality](#) interacts with the environment can be found in the work context. One of our findings was that the link between emotional stability and work satisfaction increases across age. This might be explained by the fact that emotionally stable people are

less scared to quit unsatisfactory jobs and more likely to apply for jobs that are more challenging and perhaps more fulfilling and enjoyable in the long run," van Scheppingen added.

Future studies should examine how variables that change with age, such as income, [employment status](#), [marital status](#) and health, affect the relationship between [personality traits](#) and overall satisfaction with life, according to the researchers.

"While we did not examine what caused these changes, [the research] shows that our personalities and our happiness are not set in stone," van Scheppingen said. "Perhaps we may even be able to influence how we change: If we try to become more organized, outgoing, friendly, this might increase life, social or work satisfaction as well."

More information: The link between personality, global, and domain-specific satisfaction across the adult lifespan, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2023). [www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rele ... /psp-pspp0000461.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rele.../psp-pspp0000461.pdf) , [dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000461](https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000461)

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