Is Participation in an Adult Education Program Associated with Well-being in Urban Community-dwelling Older Adults?

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Abstract

Objectives. This study examined if and how participation in learning activities are associated with life satisfaction among older learners in an urban community.

Methods. 420 older adults in UNLV’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute completed the online survey. A path model was used to investigate direct and indirect effects of learning activities on life satisfaction.

Results. Participation in additional organized education programs was associated with greater life satisfaction, although self-learning was not.

Discussion. The findings about quantity and types of learning activities are informative for lifelong learning programs and suggest possible policy changes.
Introduction

- Lifelong learning is known to address numerous later life challenges, and enhance life satisfaction. (Withnall, 2012)
- Lifelong learning refers to any types of learning activities over the life span. (Commission of the European Communities, 2001)
- Yet, lifelong learning can be classified into different types (e.g., formal vs. informal; self-learning vs. organized learning).
- A positive association between education (i.e., formal education; educational attainment) and well-being is well-established. (Kitagawa & Houser; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999)
- Previous studies treated the lifelong learning as a means to gain economic benefits or to promote careers. (Feinstein & Hammond, 2004).
Research Question

• Is there an association between types of lifelong learning activities and life satisfaction?

Methods - Data

• Data were collected from 456 participants in UNLV’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI).
• OLLI membership requirements include age 50 years and older; $75 for unlimited courses each semester.
• We used an online Survey system (Qualtrics) to disseminate the survey.
• After excluding missing values, the final sample size was 420.
Methods - Measures

Dependent Variable: Global domain satisfaction
• The average value of self-evaluation in five specific life domains (health, family, friendship, hobbies, and place of residence) (1-7: “None” – “Very Great Deal”)

Independent variable: Learning Activities
• Participation in non-OLLI-related learning activities (yes, no)
• Engagement in self-learning activities (yes, no)

Covariates
• Age, gender, race, total years of formal education, Income levels, employment, self-rated health, religious affiliation, martial status, social activity (George, 2010)
Methods – Analytic Approach

• A path model was used to examine the theoretical propositions of the variables. (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2006)
• Global domain satisfaction was modeled as a function of independent variables and covariates.
• Specific indirect path through health was included in the model (see Figure 1).
• Model fit was evaluated using a series of fit indices (e.g., $X^2$, CFI, TLI, RMSEA). (Wang & Wang, 2012)
# Results—Selected Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean (SD) or % [N = 420]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction [1(least) – 7 (most)]</td>
<td>5.56 (0.98)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>71.19 (7.54)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender (women)</td>
<td>72.28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>16.33 (4.18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-rated health (excellent, very good, good)</td>
<td>93.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation (yes)</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social activities (yes)</td>
<td>46.52%</td>
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Results—Path Model

• Statistically significant paths and correlations are shown in Figure 2.
• Participation in non-OLLI programs was associated with greater global domain satisfaction ($\beta$-standardized = 0.11, SE = 0.04, $p < 0.05$).
• Engagement in self-learning was not associated with global domain satisfaction.
• Although years of education was not significant, it is highly correlated with participation in non-OLLI program ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$) and self-learning ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$).
Figure 2: Statistically Significant Paths and Correlations in the path model
Discussion & Conclusions

• A positive direct association between participation in non-OLLI programs and life satisfaction provides insight to how to promote more lifelong learning in OLLI programs and other lifelong learning program development.

• Policy-level interventions to promote lifelong learning ensures sufficient learning opportunities for older populations. (Feinstein & Hammond, 2004)

• Future research may examine more diverse older populations (e.g., non-lifelong learners, racial/ethnic minorities).

References Available Upon Request