

September 1997 (Volume 38, Number 3)

## **Role of Psychological Factors in the Aging Process – Stress and Self-Perceived Health as Predictors of Aging**

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**Aim.** To investigate the role of stressful life events in predicting mental and physical health of the elderly, and the social, psychological or health factors which might be the longitudinal predictors of elderly people's stressful experiences.

**Method.** Longitudinal study of the aging of urban elderly started in 1979. The second measurement point was in 1994. The subjects were 99 elderly persons, 37 men and 62 women. The average age was 58 years (range 45-73) in 1979, and 72 years (range 59-89) in 1994. Features analyzed in 1979 included sociodemographic data, family status, health status, Activities of Daily Life Index, and scales of psychosomatic symptoms, health behavior, social participation, self-perceived health, and life satisfaction. In 1994, the scales of stressful life events, social support, coping style, and Zung depression scale were added. Trained interviewers collected the data in subjects' homes, using a structured interview. All data were supplied by the subjects themselves.

**Results.** Significant age changes from 1979 to 1994 were decreased family size, increased proportion of unmarried and chronically ill subjects, increased psychosomatic symptoms, and decreased functional ability. Cross-sectionally, the 1994 results of the multiple regression analyses showed that stress, social support, and coping style were significant predictors of health, measured by self-assessment, functional ability, psychosomatic symptoms, and depression. Longitudinally, the significant 1979 predictor of 1994 stress was self-perceived health.

**Conclusion.** Self-perceived health is strongly associated with mortality, stress, social support, and coping style as mediating factors. Self-perceived health, social support provided by other people, stress, and coping style are psychological factors that significantly predict aging.

**Key words:** *aged; health status; stress, psychological; longitudinal studies*

Received: April 25, 1997

Accepted: May 26, 1997

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