

Happiness and optimism in institutionalized elderly

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In this work we want to study the relationship between perceived happiness and some characteristics of personality, in the general perspective of quality of life. In particular we have studied how personal inclinations for optimism or pessimism, or expectations for positive and negative outcomes influence the individual's well-being level (measured as happiness). The construct of happiness we have considered is that Kozma, Stone, Stones, Hannah, & McNeil, (1990) proposed as a character disposition or inclination expressed as the prevalence of positive affects. The scale they constructed, the "Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness" or MUNSH (Kozma & Stones, 1980), aims at underlining the relationship between positive affects and negative affects and their persistence over time. Another important purpose of our research was to verify the psychometric properties of the MUNSH. 300 elderly people that lived in institutions (range 65-107 years old) were interviewed and assessed with the following questionnaires: MUNSH, ELOT and EPQ-r.

A satisfactory level of subjective perception of happiness was found in the subjects of our sample, even in their present condition of institutionalization, and their past stressful experiences. From the statistical analyses carried out, positive relationships between scores of happiness and personality characteristics have emerged. Besides confirming the existence of a significant relation between happiness and optimism-pessimism, the statistics of our study have shown that both these dispositions are stable over time.

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