

The maintenance of cerebral plasticity in aging and the positive impact of intergenerational communication.

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As people age, they often reduce their level of day to day activity. Part of the aging phenomenon is referred to as compensation theory. Compensation theory refers to the ability the brain has to be flexible and adapt to environmental demands. When aging, individuals may sense a decline in their ability to adapt and problem solve. Language facility and increased levels of language stimulation help to maintain this cognitive function. One of the best sources of language maintenance is communication with younger generations; the frequency and quality of those interactions has a generalized cognitive benefit.

The researchers sought to investigate the correlation between a good relationship with grandchildren, satisfaction in life and performance on a test of perceptual recognition.

The sample included 96 persons, 65 years or older, from varied socioeconomic strata. A semi-structured interview was conducted to assess the life style of an individual and the quality of his/her relationships with grandchildren. The results of these assessments indicated that there was a positive correlation between relationships with grandchildren and ratings of life satisfaction across all ages. This was true for both men and women in the sample. The finding of a positive correlation between high quality relationships with grandchildren, a high rating of life satisfaction and high scores on a visual recognition test were evidenced across the age span of the subjects. The research has highlighted two key factors in the nature of the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren: the first factor is the quality of emotional bonding in the relationship and the second factor is the frequency of activities.

In conclusion, the aging brain seems to benefit from intergenerational relationships. Moreover, the researchers confirmed the hypothesis that quality relationships also benefit the older person's perception of satisfaction with his/her life. Being a good grandparent has benefits not only to the grandchild, but to the grandparent him/herself.

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