SPIRITUALITY AND LIFE REVIEW AT THE END OF LIFE IN OLD AGE

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The Third and Fourth ages of life bring an increasing preoccupation with our inner selves, our capacity to live with our own pasts and the increasing losses of the present. These spiritual matters are central to the wellbeing of the newly expanded numbers of the very old and in turn of the health of the societies in which they live. Learning to live with ourselves and our past and future as we approach the end of life, is not simply a matter of private reflection. Nor is spirituality confined to those in faith communities. This presentation will explore the dimensions of our spiritual selves as explored through life review to enhance later life. It will consider the unseen 'iceberg' of 'biographical pain'. The earlier findings will be incorporated into findings from current research on end of life care in care homes, commissioned by Public Health England.

HELPING OTHER PEOPLE AND HEALTH

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The purpose of this presentation is see if other people bolsters the health of the support provider. Evidence in favor of this proposition comes from three papers that assess three different types of religious helping behavior: giving spiritual support (spiritual support is assistance that is given in order to enhance the religious beliefs and behaviors of the recipient), praying for others, and performing volunteer work. Health is measured with three biological outcomes: cholesterol, C-reactive protein, and resting pulse rates. The data for all three papers comes from the Landmark Spirituality and Health Survey. The findings suggest that providing each type of religiously-oriented support is associated with more favorable health (i.e., lower levels of cholesterol, lower levels of C-reactive protein, and lower resting pulse rates). A theoretical rationale for why helping others conveys health benefits will be provided.

SPIRIT AND BELIEF AS A ROADMAP FOR A LONG LIFE?

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Life in a time of flux concerning the purpose and legitimizing identities associated with longevity, has led to a series of proposals for filling these extra years. While a policy consensus has emerged that extra years of work might be the answer, this leaves open questions about the role of intergenerational relations, vulnerability and engaging with finitude. An alternative discourse based on belief proffers answers to these questions which may require closer engagement by critical forms of gerontology. The degree to which these competing narratives offer a roadmap for a long life will be discussed.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATER LIFE: PERSPECTIVES FROM A 45-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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How does spiritual engagement or religious involvement change with age? An accumulating body of evidence says there is spiritual development in later life, supporting psychodevelopmental theories of James, Jung, and Erickson. This study examines such change with data from both survey and in-depth interview responses from the Longitudinal Study of Generations, a study that began in 1970–1 with 2044 family members from 364 three-generation families. Data for this analysis come from the Wave-9 surveys in 2016, along with intensive interviews with 70 individuals 65–95 from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds. Results indicate complex trajectories of both change and continuity as individuals reflect on their religious and spiritual biographies following retirement. In the qualitative data we find three patterns of spiritual and religious change reported by respondents: (1) increase over the past 10 years (the most common pattern); (2) stability—maintaining the same level of spiritual and religious involvement as in mid-life; (3) decrease—declining or dropping out of religious engagement. We discuss these findings in terms of both life-course personality theories and social integration/support theories.

SESSION 3825 (SYMPOSIUM)

SUCCESSFUL AGING IN VERY OLD AGE: THE ROLE OF ACTIVITIES

Chair: D.S. Jopp, *University of Lausanne, Lausanne, SCHWEIZ, Switzerland*

Discussant: I. Skoog, *University of Gothenburg*
D. Spini, *Universite de Lausanne*

Since the beginning of the investigation of successful aging activity engagement has been discussed as a key factor. While empirical evidence suggests positive effects of activity engagement in younger old age, less is known about the role of activities in very old age. This symposium tries to close this gap by presenting findings on the importance of activities for successful aging from four international samples with very old individuals. Studies consider different types of activities (e.g., current vs prior leisure activities) as well as different successful aging outcomes including cognitive functioning, functional ability, and well-being. Specifically, Falk and Skoog investigated functional (dis)ability in two cohorts of Swedish 85-year old individuals and the impact of leisure activities. While disability in basic activities of daily living decreased, disability in instrumental activities increased over cohorts; reduced social involvement in the latter cohort may be associated with less IADL capacity. Jopp et al. examined the effect of prior activities on cognitive functioning in two cohorts of the Heidelberg Centenarian Study. Cognitive functioning was higher in the more recent centenarian cohort; prior activities were linked with higher cognitive functioning. Lampraki and Jopp investigated current leisure activities in the Fordham Centenarian Study. Religious and social-public activities were associated with lower depression; social-private activities and technology use were associated with better cognition. Araujo et al. examined leisure activities in the Oporto Centenarian Study. Findings indicated associations between religious activities and well-being. In sum, findings confirm the importance of activity engagement for successful aging in very old age.