

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN OLD AGE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DETERMINING FACTORS AND THE IMPACT ON WELL-BEING

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Abstract: *Population aging is a global challenge, and the focus on quality of life in later life becomes essential. This review analyzes the determinants of quality of life in older adults and their impact on well-being. It examines individual factors (physical and mental health, lifestyle, personal resources), social factors (social support, interpersonal relationships, social participation), and environmental factors (physical and social environment, technology). The review explores how these factors influence well-being in old age, including physical, psychological, social, and emotional dimensions. Strategies to promote quality of life in older adults are also analyzed, such as health improvement interventions, social support programs, cognitive stimulation and social engagement activities, education, and lifelong learning. Finally, the practical implications of the research are discussed, finding gaps in the literature and providing recommendations for future studies and public policies aimed at supporting active aging and a high quality of life in later life. This review offers an updated synthesis of knowledge on quality of life in older adults, being relevant for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers involved in improving the well-being of older people.*

Key words: *quality of life, aging, well-being, active aging.*

1. Introduction

Population aging represents one of the most significant demographic transformations of the 21st century, with profound implications globally. This phenomenon, characterized by the increasing proportion of older adults within society, is not merely a statistical matter but a complex reality that

redefines social, economic, and cultural structures. In this context, the concern for the quality of life in older age becomes an essential priority, both at the individual and societal levels.

Quality of life, a multidimensional and dynamic concept, goes beyond the mere absence of disease and refers to an individual's subjective perception of their well-being in various life domains. This

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includes physical aspects (health, mobility), psychological aspects (self-esteem, emotions), social aspects (interpersonal relationships, social support), economic aspects (financial security), and even spiritual aspects (meaning of life, values). In older age, quality of life can be influenced by a multitude of interconnected factors, from the physiological changes inherent in the aging process and the coexistence of chronic conditions to life events such as retirement, the loss of a partner or friends, as well as the socio-economic and cultural context.

The concept of quality of life is complex and multidimensional, having been defined in various ways over time. A comprehensive definition, frequently used in scientific research, is the one proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO):

Quality of life is an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and ¹ value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns.

This definition highlights several essential aspects:

- **Subjectivity:** Quality of life is a personal and subjective evaluation of one's own life, influenced by each individual's experiences, values, and expectations;
- **Multidimensionality:** Quality of life includes a series of interconnected dimensions, such as physical and mental health, emotional state, social relationships, the environment, level of independence, activities performed, meaning of life, and overall satisfaction;
- **Context:** Quality of life is influenced by the cultural, social and economic context in which the individual lives, as well as by their own value and belief

systems;

- **Dynamics:** Quality of life is not a static concept but can change over time, depending on life events, physiological and psychological changes, and other factors.

Quality of life is a broad concept that encompasses the subjective evaluation of various aspects of life, including physical and mental state, social functioning, life satisfaction, meaning and purpose in life, as well as the perception of control over one's own life." [16]

This definition extends the concept of quality of life beyond physical and psychological dimensions, emphasizing the importance of social and existential aspects, as well as the sense of personal control. It is important to note that this definition was developed in the context of research on individuals with disabilities, but it is also relevant to the general population, including older adults.

Quality of life is defined as a multidimensional and subjective evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of life, including physical, psychological, social, and material domains. [7].

This definition emphasizes the complex and multidimensional nature of quality of life, explicitly mentioning physical, psychological, social, and material domains as essential components. It also highlights the subjective evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of life, recognizing that everyone's perception of their own quality of life is unique and influenced by their personal experiences and values.

Quality of life reflects the degree of satisfaction a person has with the physical, psychological, social, and environmental aspects of their life” [5]

This definition focuses on the individual's degree of satisfaction with the various aspects of their life. It emphasizes the importance of the subjective evaluation of quality of life and includes essential dimensions such as physical and psychological state, social relationships, and the environment.

- **Quality of life: a personal perspective**

Beyond academic definitions, quality of life is a unique journey, a dance between inner experiences and external circumstances. It is a complex mosaic, whose pieces are represented by physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships, the meaning we give to our existence, the environment in which we live, and our ability to adapt to changes.

In older age, quality of life takes on a special significance. It is the moment when we look back with gratitude at the stages we have gone through, but also with hope towards the future. It is a period in which we value human connections, simple moments of joy, and the possibility of leaving a positive mark on the world perhaps more than ever.

2. Research Methodology

The following electronic databases, recognized for their extensive coverage in the fields of social sciences, medicine, and gerontology, were consulted:

- **PubMed:** A biomedical database of the National Institutes of Health, indexing articles in medicine, nursing, and related sciences;

- **Scopus:** A multidisciplinary database indexing abstracts and citations from scientific, technical, and medical literature;
- **Web of Science:** A citation indexing platform providing access to a wide range of databases, including the Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Arts & Humanities Citation Index;
- **PsycINFO:** A database of the American Psychological Association, indexing literature in psychology and behavioral sciences;
- **Google Scholar:** An academic search engine indexing scholarly articles, books, theses, and other academic publications.

Following searches in these relevant academic databases, an initial 1,982 studies were identified that addressed the topic of quality of life in older age. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, which focused on thematic relevance, methodological quality, and publication period (2000-2024), only 15 studies met all the necessary conditions for inclusion in this review.

To ensure a comprehensive search, the following keywords and combinations were used, both in English and Romanian: „calitatea vieții” / “quality of life”, „vârsta a treia” / “older adults” / “elderly” / “aging”, „îmbătrânire activă” / “active aging”, „stare de bine” / “well-being”, „factori determinanți” / “determinants”, „impact” / „impact”, „strategii” / “strategies”, „sănătate fizică” / “physical health”, „sănătate mintală” / “mental health”, „suport social” / “social support”, „participare socială” / “social participation”.

2.1. Study Selection Criteria

➤ Inclusion Criteria:

- Empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses addressing the quality of life in older adults;
 - Studies published in English or Romanian, within the 2000-2024 timeframe;
 - Studies exploring the determinants of quality of life and/or their impact on well-being.
- Exclusion Criteria:
- Studies that do not focus on quality of life or do not include older adults;
 - Studies published in languages other than English or Romanian;
 - Studies that do not provide relevant data for the review's objectives;
 - Studies of low methodological quality.

2.2. Methodological limitations

Selection Bias: The possibility that the search strategy may not have identified all relevant studies, despite efforts to ensure comprehensive coverage;

-Database Limitations: Academic databases may have limitations in terms of coverage of certain types of publications or certain languages;

-Study Heterogeneity: The difficulty in comparing studies with different methodologies, varied measurement instruments, and diverse populations;

-Language Limitations: The exclusion of studies published in languages other than English or Romanian may limit the generalizability of the results;

-Evaluation Subjectivity: The evaluation of the methodological quality of studies may be influenced by researcher subjectivity

3. Determinants of Quality of Life in Older Age

In this study [4], Ann Bowling examines the concept of successful aging in the context of 21st-century demographic and social changes. The article highlights that successful aging is not limited to the absence of disease but also includes maintaining a high quality of life, which is influenced by a range of individual, psychological, and social factors.

Bowling emphasizes the importance of personal resources, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and a sense of control, in maintaining well-being in older age. The article also highlights the role of social relationships, social participation, and meaningful activities in promoting successful aging.

In conclusion, Bowling argues that successful aging is a multidimensional process that involves adapting to changes, maintaining activity and social engagement, as well as cultivating personal resources.

The definition of health in older age must transcend the traditional biomedical model and include aspects related to functionality, adaptation, and resilience.

As emphasized by the World Health Organization (2015) in the „World report on ageing and health,” health in older age is not only about the absence of disease but also about maintaining functional ability. This report provides a global perspective on health in older age, highlighting the importance of maintaining functional capacity and well-being.

Furthermore, the study by Beard et al. [2], published in „The Lancet,” explores the concept of healthy aging, highlighting the importance of optimizing functional capacity and well-being in older age. This

study underscores the need for a multidimensional approach to health in older age, encompassing biological, psychological, and social aspects.

Lifestyle represents a fundamental pillar of quality of life in older age, encompassing a set of behaviors and practices that directly influence physical and mental health.

Regular physical activity stands out as a crucial element of lifestyle in older age. According to the World Health Organization's guidelines (2020), regular exercise can improve mobility, muscle strength, and mood, reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. These guidelines offer specific recommendations on the type, intensity, and duration of physical activity suitable for older adults, emphasizing the importance of adapting exercises to individual capabilities.

Nutrition also plays an essential role in maintaining health in older age. A balanced diet, rich in nutrients, vitamins, and minerals, can contribute to maintaining body weight, preventing nutritional deficiencies, and reducing the risk of chronic diseases.

The study by Govindaraju et al. [9] investigated the relationship between the dietary habits of older adults and their life satisfaction. Researchers analyzed multiple existing studies on this topic, seeking and selecting only those that met certain quality criteria. They found that a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is associated with better quality of life in older adults, emphasizing the importance of nutrition for mental and physical health, as well as general well-being.

Quality sleep is another important aspect of lifestyle in older age. Restful sleep is vital for cognitive function,

emotional well-being, and the immune system. According to a study by Sella et al. [17], sleep disorders are common in older adults and are associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline, depression, and other health problems. The study emphasizes the importance of implementing strategies to improve sleep quality, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia and the use of appropriate medications, under medical supervision.

Stress management is also an important element of lifestyle in older age. Relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga, can help reduce stress and promote emotional well-being.¹ Studies have highlighted the benefits of practicing mindfulness and other stress management techniques for improving the quality of life in older adults. For example, a study by Lwi et al. [11] investigated the effects of a mindfulness meditation program on depressive symptoms and sleep quality in older adults with major depression. The results showed that participants who followed the meditation program showed significant improvements in depressive symptoms and sleep quality compared to the control group. This study suggests that mindfulness techniques can be effective in managing stress and promoting emotional well-being in older adults.

Personal resources, such as coping, resilience, and a sense of life's meaning, play an essential role in maintaining quality of life in older age. These resources can help older adults face the challenges associated with aging, maintain their emotional well-being, and cultivate a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

- Coping and Resilience: The ability to cope with stress and adapt to changes.

- **Meaning of Life and Spirituality:** The feeling of purpose and connection to something greater than oneself

Demographic factors, such as age, sex, and marital status, can significantly influence the quality of life in older age. Demographic differences can lead to variations in health status, access to resources, and social support, which can have a profound impact on quality of life. For example, a meta-analysis by Pinquart & Sörensen [15] explores the influence of socio-economic and demographic factors on well-being in older age, highlighting the importance of these aspects in the context of aging.

Relationships with family, friends, and the community provide an essential framework for emotional and practical support, contributing to the overall well-being of older adults. As highlighted by Holt-Lunstad [10], social connections play a crucial role in keeping health and longevity in older age. These networks not only offer a sense of belonging and security but also concrete support in difficult times, such as health problems or the loss of a partner. Furthermore, active participation in the community can reduce feelings of social isolation and promote a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Social participation plays a vital role in keeping quality of life in older age, offering opportunities for social interaction and active involvement.

According to a study by Glass et al. [8], active social participation is associated with better psychological well-being and a reduced risk of cognitive decline in older adults. Volunteering activities offer opportunities to contribute to the community and keep social connections, while recreational activities, such as hobbies and physical exercise, promote physical and mental health.

Socio-economic status is a significant determinant of quality of life in older age, encompassing income, education, and housing conditions. These elements directly influence access to essential services and resources, having a profound impact on the well-being of older adults. For example, the study by Braveman et al. [3], published in the *Annual Review of Public Health*, highlights the strong link between socio-economic inequities and health in older age. The authors emphasize that individuals with lower socio-economic status face an increased risk of chronic diseases, limited access to quality medical services, and poor housing conditions, which contribute to a lower quality of life.

3.3 Environmental factors

The physical environment, with its components of accessibility, safety, and transportation, plays an essential role in maintaining the mobility and independence of older adults.

The study by Oswald and Wahl [12] in the *European Journal of Ageing* emphasizes the importance of adapting housing and the surrounding environment to support active aging and to allow older adults to remain independent and participate in community life.

The social environment, with its components such as health services, technology, and public policies, plays a crucial role in supporting active aging. Thus, the study by Peek et al. [13] in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* highlights how technology, especially the internet and mobile devices, can ease access to information and health services for older adults, contributing to active aging and improved quality of life.

4. Impact of Determinant Factors on Well-being

In this study, Phyo et al. [14], the authors investigated the association between quality of life and mortality in the general population. They used three databases to identify relevant studies and included only those studies that assessed quality of life with standardized instruments and examined the risk of mortality in non-patient individuals.

Of the 4,184 articles identified, 47 were eligible for inclusion, including approximately 1,200,000 participants. The majority of studies (91.5%) reported that better quality of life is associated with a lower risk of mortality. More specifically, the results of four meta-analyses showed that a higher level of health-related quality of life is associated with a lower risk of mortality.

These results suggest that improving quality of life, especially in terms of physical and mental health, can significantly contribute to reducing the risk of mortality in older adults. Also, quality of life assessment measures could be used as screening tools in general clinical practice to identify individuals at high risk of mortality and implement early interventions.

Drewnowski and Evans, emphasize that older people represent an increasingly large segment of the population, and maintaining good health for this category is a major public health challenge. Increased longevity is often accompanied by multiple chronic conditions that can lead to disability and the need for assistance, which makes the extra years often marked by health problems, reduced mobility, depression, isolation, and loneliness.

In particular, the article highlights the strong desire of older people to seek health information and make behavioral changes to maintain their health and independence. Physical activity and diet are among the most important self-care behaviors, having a significant impact on health and quality of life at this age.

Thus, the positive impact of adequate nutrition and regular physical activity on physical and mental health is highlighted by improving well-being, reducing the risk of chronic diseases, and promoting a longer and healthier life.

Stress is another major problem faced by older people. In a world where stress is omnipresent, especially in older people, this article by Frias & Whyne [6] highlights the importance of mindfulness as a protective strategy against the negative effects of stress. The study, conducted on a sample of healthy adults aged 50 to 85, shows that chronic stress is inversely proportional to physical and mental health. However, those who practice mindfulness manage to significantly mitigate these negative effects.

The results emphasize that mindfulness can protect older people from the harmful effects of stress, thus contributing to a better quality of life

Holt-Lunstad (2018) [10] emphasized that social relationships are essential for human survival and maintaining overall well-being. The study showed that social isolation and loneliness are associated with an increased risk of premature mortality, comparable to the risks associated with smoking and obesity. For example, social isolation increases the risk of premature death by 29%, and loneliness by 26%.

The research highlighted that quality social relationships can reduce the

incidence of major psychological, cognitive, and physical morbidities, and improve the overall perception of quality of life. Holt-Lunstad emphasized that

social relationships not only provide emotional support but also contribute to physical health through biological mechanisms, such as reducing inflammation and improving immune system function.

Another important aspect of the study is that quality social relationships can influence health behaviors, such as adherence to treatments and cooperation in medical interventions. Social connections can also moderate the negative effects of stress on mental health, thus contributing to better psychological well-being.

The study by Glass et al. in 2000 [8] investigated how involvement in social and productive activities can influence longevity and well-being in older adults. The study analyzed data from a representative sample of Americans aged 65 and over, following their evolution over a period of seven years.

The results showed that active social participation, such as volunteering, participation in clubs and social organizations, and involvement in recreational activities, has a significant positive impact on longevity and psychological well-being. Participants who were socially active had a lower risk of mortality compared to those who did not participate in such activities.

The study emphasized that social activities not only maintain physical and cognitive activity but also provide valuable opportunities for interaction and maintaining social connections. Involvement in the community can prevent feelings of loneliness and

isolation, which are major risk factors for depression and other mental health problems.

Moreover, the authors highlighted that productive activities, such as part-time work or engaging in hobbies and personal projects, contribute to maintaining a sense of purpose and personal achievement, which is essential for overall well-being.

The study by Braveman et al. in 2011 [3] shows that socio-economic status is a major determinant of quality of life in older age. Adequate income ensures access to health services and decent housing conditions, essential aspects for maintaining health and independence. The study by Braveman and colleagues showed that people with higher incomes have access to quality medical care and safe housing, which contributes significantly to their overall health.

Education also plays a crucial role in influencing health knowledge and the ability to make informed decisions. Educated people have a better understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are more likely to adopt health-beneficial behaviors. Education also influences access to resources and opportunities, which can have a positive impact on quality of life.

Safe and accessible housing conditions allow for mobility and independence, reducing the risk of accidents and promoting an active lifestyle. People who live in safe and well-equipped areas have more opportunities to participate in social and recreational activities, which contributes to maintaining physical and mental health.

Socio-economic inequities in the health of older adults were highlighted by Braveman et al. (2011) [3], emphasizing

the need for policies that address these differences and promote health equity. The study showed that differences in access to resources and opportunities can have a significant impact on quality of life and longevity.

The accessibility of buildings and public transportation is essential to allow mobility and participation in social activities for older adults. Oswald and Wahl (2005) [12] showed that an accessible environment can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and encourage an active and independent life. For example, easy access to public transportation allows older adults to participate in social and recreational activities, keeping them physically and mentally active.

The safety of housing and the surrounding environment is also crucial for preventing accidents and injuries. The study emphasized the importance of adapting homes to support active aging, such as installing support bars, removing obstacles, and ensuring adequate lighting. These measures not only prevent accidents but also contribute to maintaining a sense of safety and comfort.

Oswald and Wahl (2005) [12] emphasized that a physical environment adapted to the needs of older people can have a significant impact on their health and quality of life. Housing adaptations can reduce the risk of falls and other domestic accidents, which are common in older adults and can lead to loss of independence. Also, a safe and accessible environment can reduce anxiety and stress, contributing to better overall well-being.

In conclusion, the study by Oswald and Wahl underscores the importance of the physical environment for the health and quality of life of older adults. Policies and

programs that promote home adaptation and urban environment accessibility can play a crucial role in supporting active aging.

Access to affordable and quality health services plays an essential role in the prevention and treatment of diseases in older adults. Peek and colleagues (2014) [13] emphasized that a well-organized and accessible health system can significantly improve quality of life, reducing the risk of complications and promoting optimal health.

Technology, especially the internet and mobile devices, has greatly facilitated access to information and health services. The study showed that older people who use technology have faster and more efficient access to medical information, online consultations, and health resources. This increased access can contribute to better management of personal health and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

5. Strategies to Promote Quality of Life in Older Age

➤ *Personalized Assistance Technology:*

- **Smart Wearable Devices:** Smart bracelets and watches that monitor health can provide real-time alerts about heart rate, activity level, and sleep. Integrating these devices with health applications can help older adults better manage their health and be proactive in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- **Virtual Assistants:** Using virtual assistants to remind older people
- to take their medications, participate in social activities, or exercise. These assistants can provide emotional support and conversation to reduce feelings of loneliness.

➤ *Personalized Fitness and Wellness Programs:*

- Adapted Fitness Sessions: Exercise classes tailored to the needs and physical abilities of older adults, including Pilates, yoga, tai chi, and even strength training. These sessions can be offered both in person and online to ensure accessibility for all.
- Personalized Nutrition Programs: Personalized meal plans that take into account the specific nutritional needs of older adults, encouraging a balanced and healthy diet. These plans can include consultations with nutritionists and access to educational resources.

➤ *Active Aging Communities:*

- Intergenerational Spaces: Creating intergenerational communities where older adults can interact with young people, sharing experiences and learning from each other. These spaces can include community centers, community gardens, and shared social activities.
- Mentoring Programs: Involving older adults in mentoring programs where they can provide guidance and support to young people. This not only provides a sense of purpose and achievement but also promotes social connections.

➤ *Integrated Health Services:*

- Mobile Clinics and Telemedicine: Offering medical services through mobile clinics and telemedicine platforms to ensure access to quality medical care, regardless of location. These services can include medical consultations, health monitoring, and chronic disease management.
- Care Coordinators: Implementing care coordinators to help older adults

navigate the healthcare system, plan and monitor treatments, and coordinate support services.

➤ *Promoting Mental and Emotional Health:*

- Online Therapy and Counseling: Access to online therapy and counseling services to address mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. These services can be provided through telepsychology platforms and mobile applications.
- Mindfulness and Meditation Programs: Offering mindfulness and meditation programs to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. These programs can include guided sessions and educational resources accessible online.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

This article explored multiple essential aspects that influence the quality of life in older age, highlighting the importance of a healthy lifestyle, social connections, and the surrounding environment. In a world where the global population is aging rapidly, these findings are more relevant than ever, providing a solid foundation for interventions and policies that can improve the well-being of older adults.

The Importance of Lifestyle: It was highlighted that adequate nutrition and physical activity play a crucial role in maintaining health and well-being in older people. The cited studies demonstrate that adopting a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of chronic diseases, improve mental health, and extend the duration of active life.

Stress Management: Stress is a determinant of quality of life, and

mindfulness techniques and other stress management methods can have a significant impact on the mental and physical health of older adults. The mentioned study showed that mindfulness can protect against the harmful effects of stress, thus improving overall well-being.

Social Connections: The studies by Holt-Lunstad and Glass et al. emphasized the importance of social relationships and active participation in the community. A solid social network not only provides emotional support but also contributes to physical health by reducing inflammation and improving immune system function. Participation in social activities maintains physical and cognitive activity and prevents feelings of isolation.

Socio-economic Status: Socio-economic inequities have a profound impact on the quality of life in older age. Adequate income, education, and housing conditions are essential factors for maintaining health and independence. The study by Braveman et al. underscores the need for policies that reduce inequalities and promote health equity.

Physical and Social Environment: Oswald and Wahl, as well as Peek et al., highlighted the importance of the physical and social environment in supporting active aging. An accessible and safe environment allows for mobility and participation in social activities, while technology and public policies support the economic and social security of older adults.

Strategies to Promote Quality of Life: Innovative proposals for promoting quality of life in older age include the use of technology for health monitoring, personalized fitness and nutrition programs, intergenerational communities, mobile clinics and telemedicine, and promoting mental health through online

therapy and mindfulness programs.

In light of the discussions, it becomes clear that aging should not be seen as a stage of decline but as an opportunity to live fully, with dignity and joy. To transform this vision into reality, it is essential to embrace a holistic approach that recognizes the complexity of the human being and the interconnection between mind, body, and spirit.

Imagine a world where every older person wakes up in the morning with energy and enthusiasm, ready to live their day to the fullest. A world where the body is strong and flexible, the mind is sharp and creative, and the heart is full of love and compassion. This world is possible if we commit to cultivating a healthy lifestyle, which includes regular movement, balanced nutrition, and restful sleep.

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