

Defining mental well-being and meaning in life – notions from old people and professionals

Sirkkaliisa Heimonen, Suvi Fried, Minna Laine, Piia Tiilikallio, The Age Institute

Meaning in Old Age project (RAY 2011–2014) has produced knowledge about the possibilities to maintain and enhance mental well-being in old age. Activities during the project have included forums for open discussion and the development and supervision of discussion groups with old people.

Focus on mental well-being:

- Updated information
- Tools for support
- Positive concepts and vocabulary
- Training for professionals in dementia care

Initially the key mental resources were defined as the sense of coherence, coping skills, resilience, hope and meaning in life. Emphasizing meaning in life in old age is based on a logotherapeutic approach, in which the guiding principles underline human dignity, possibilities and hope. The definitions of mental well-being of old people themselves have also been collected continuously in small events, discussions, interviews and written comments.

The Journey of Possibilities – training for professionals in dementia care

- Human dignity and uniqueness of a person with dementia
- Meaning in life
- Good life

Training professionals in dementia care has also been in focus of development in the project. The Journey of Possibilities training is an application of a logotherapeutic approach in dementia care. The training consists of seminars, lectures, independent study and a conclusive development assignment.

One main result of the project is a discussion group model and the training for group supervisors. The discussion group model, The Bridge of Mental Well-Being, consists of ten structured meetings. The themes of the meetings all focus on supporting the participants in finding their own resources.

Meaning in Old Age project has indicated that the majority of old people are interested in mental well-being and individual ways to improve it. Experiences of mental well-being are possible despite the vulnerabilities of old age.

Finding resources of mental well-being – Key issues

- Life experience
- Meaning in life
- Focus on resources and attitudes
- Resilience – resistance and growth

Theory and experiences combined: synopsis of mental well-being in old age

Emotions and experiences

Skills and capabilities

Will and attitude