

## Research Article

# Aging in Precarious Circumstances: Do Positive Views on Aging Make a Difference?

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## Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** Precariousness, defined as low income combined with lack of security for retirement, can influence the way people grow old and result in health inequalities in old age.

**Design and methods:** A sequential mixed methods approach was used to identify differences in behavioral (physical activity), social (social network), and psychological resources (positive views on aging) that middle-aged individuals from both precarious and financially secure backgrounds use in preparation for positive aging and keep high levels of health and well-being. It was investigated whether positive views on aging can compensate the detrimental association of a lack of resources with health and well-being in midlife. Data from the German Aging Survey ( $N = 1,992$  in the secure group,  $N = 240$  in the precarious group) were analyzed to understand the relationship between resources on the one hand and health and well-being on the other, as well as to compare the strategies of individuals with precarious and financially secure backgrounds. Semistructured interviews with middle-aged individuals ( $N = 20$ ) from these two categories were analyzed in order to further explain the quantitative findings.

**Results:** Precarious individuals are indeed disadvantaged in terms of behavioral, social, and psychological resources as well as in health and well-being. However, having a positive view on aging can compensate for insufficient resources. Qualitative findings showed differences in strategies for resource management and perceptions of positive aging.

**Implications:** Secondary analysis of quantitative and qualitative data reflects the importance of positive views on aging as a resource for a healthy old age despite aging in precarious circumstances.

**Keywords:** Positive views on aging, Precariousness, Middle-age, Mixed methods, Resources

Previous studies show that social inequalities are reflected in the health of older adults across European countries (Brandt, Deindl, & Hank, 2012) and accumulate over the lifespan resulting in health inequalities in old age (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Gonzales, Matz-Costa, & Morrow-Howell, 2015). However, psychological resources such as a positive view on aging might act as a buffer against the negative effects of a precarious context. Thus, it is relevant to investigate how positive views on aging differ depending on the

social context in which people grow old and if these represent a health and well-being resource in midlife that can be used in preparation for old age. Successful aging, defined as physical and mental health, social engagement, and lack of disability in old age (Rowe & Kahn, 1997), holds an indisputable importance in social gerontology. However, critiques of the theory comprise its narrowness in scope, its potential for discrimination by setting unrealistic standards (Calasanti, 2015), ignorance of subjective meanings of old