

Study Reveals: Personality Traits Are Factors In Retirement Adjustment

Special To The Post
Women who have a high level of self-esteem and who are open-minded are better able to adjust to life changes and stress in retirement, according to a recent study by an assistant professor of nursing at Pace University in Pleasantville, N.Y.

Dr. Helen Patricia Neuhs, a professor in the Generic Master's Degree Program of Pace's Lienhard School of Nursing, interviewed over 100 women from the New York metropolitan area who had retired one to five years ago from full-time positions, at ages ranging between 62 and 65.

"I found that women with higher levels of self-esteem and open-mindedness made a better adjustment in retirement based on their levels of life satisfaction and self-rated health," she said.

The study, which took one year to complete, was part of Dr. Neuhs' doctoral research on women in retirement which she pursued at New York University.

"Statistics show that retirement is a significant developmental milestone and may represent a high degree of life stress," the Queens resident remarked. "Inadequate adjustment in retirement has often been associated with physical and psychological problems.

"Individuals must contend with adapting to more leisure time, reduction in finances, and structuring their lives outside the work force. Open-mindedness was seen as a measure of an individual's flexibility.

"From my study it seems that women with high levels of self-esteem and flexibility are more likely to make the appropriate changes in their lives and successfully adapt," she added.

Dr. Neuhs chose to focus on women in retirement because most of the previous studies on retirement concerned men who were blue collar workers. "Very little has been done on women, and what has been done is very controversial," she said.

"Earlier studies said women had an easy time adjusting in retirement because work was never very important to them, while more recent studies indicated just the opposite."

The majority of women retirees in the study held clerical positions while they were employed and currently ranged in the middle- to lower-upper socioeconomic level.

None had been widowed or married in the last year, although the majority of the women were currently widows. Most had children and all but six percent were born in the United States. Twenty-eight percent had worked for 40 or more years.

"What I found most interesting was that the study revealed particularly high levels of self-esteem and open-mindedness not usually associated with this age group. It makes one question the stereotype of the helpless older person who has low self-esteem and who is inflexible and unable to adjust to change," Dr. Neuhs said.

Contrary to that stereotype, these women were very independent and mobile. Many worked as volunteers while retired and 53 percent said they were active outside of their home seven days a week, according to Dr. Neuhs. Even more impressive was the fact that 72 percent saw themselves as younger than other women their own age.

In determining the level of self-esteem, open-mindedness, and adjustment in retirement, the study employed three professionally recognized scales.

One of the scales evaluated hopes and fears about the future. It revealed that 20 percent of the women feared loss of independence and health in their retired lives.

Loss of finances was also a concern but many of the women said that the best possible life they could envision for themselves in retirement was the life they were currently leading.

The women were presented a list of life stressors and asked if they had experienced any of these in the past year. More than 20 percent identified changes in their sleeping habits and almost 30 percent identified changes in their eating habits.

"The study is important because as nurses we can now identify personality traits that may contribute to problems in retirement adjustment and provide the necessary interventions like counseling or other pre-retirement assistance," Dr. Neuhs said.

Also significant, she noted, is that women now constitute the majority of the work force and the lack of reliable and consistent data has substantially increased the need to study women in retirement. "It is a wide open field," Dr. Neuhs said. We need more research on men and women in retirement and, as the population ages, it is going to become even more important.

"I hope to extend my research on this subject and do a longitudinal study from pre-retirement to post-retirement which will identify even more psychological characteristics and enable us to better understand adjustment in retirement," she concluded.

Jack And Jill Culminates Year-Long Program Of Projects

The Charlotte Chapter of Jack and Jill went to see Africa recently - the African section of the North Carolina Zoo, that is. It was the culmination of a year-long program of service projects and activities and by far all would agree, the most fun.

A group of about 60 children, mothers and fathers met at Friendship Baptist Church and rode by chartered bus to Asheboro.

There, the children had the opportunity to see first-hand many unusual animals as they would live in their natural habitat. Unlike many zoos, most of the animals in Asheboro are not caged but free to roam in a very restricted environment.

The tram ride around the park was a favorite of many of the little ones. It also gave some of the older ones the chance for photo-taking for souvenir pictures. Among the favorite subjects were the chimpanzees, the giraffes, the lions and the elephants.

After the tour of the zoo, it was time for an old fashioned family picnic.

The group selected a site high on a hill overlooking a lake. It was perfect with plenty of shade and lots of room for the children to play until it was time for the return trip to Charlotte - back from African jungle to the jungle we call the city. The group returned tired but eager to go again next year.

The Charlotte Chapter of Jack and Jill is comprised of 50 families. It is part of a national organization dedicated to enhancing the social, cultural lives of all black children as well as that of its own membership.

The Charlotte Chapter is especially proud of its children's involvement in raising funds to help the starving children of Ethiopia. To date, the children have donated the \$125 they earned by performing household chores and savings from their allowances. The person responsible for the zoo trip and Africare project is program chairperson, Carlenta Ivory. Pat Dowdy has just completed a two-year term as president. Replacing her will be Nancy Stroud.

Applications Accepted For Fitness Programs For Mature Adults

Raleigh - Assistant Secretary of Aging Elaine Stoops announced that applications are now being accepted for the first annual Governor's Award for Health and Fitness Programs for Mature Adults. The Governor's Award will be presented this fall.

"The purpose of the Governor's Award for Health and Fitness is to recognize the outstanding health and fitness programs in North Carolina for mature adults, those 55 years of age and older," Stoops said. "We also want to support Governor Martin in encouraging our older citizens to stay healthy, active, and independent."

The new award is a cooperative effort between the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health, and the N.C. Department of Human Resources' Division of Aging and Health Services. It is being sponsored by the North Carolina National Bank.

To be eligible for the Governor's Award an applicant must be a non-profit agency or organization in North Carolina; the program should be in operation at least six months during the calendar year in which the application is being made; and the program should have practical applications as well as being educational in nature. A major consideration in the judging will also be based on the applicant's capability and resources.

Entries will be judged by a distinguished panel who are experts in the fields of health, fitness, and aging. Awards of recognition may also be presented to programs exhibiting special merit in specific areas of health and fitness for older adults. The application deadline is August 15, 1985. Entry forms are available at the North Carolina Division of Aging.

For more information, contact Margot Raynor, Health and Recreation Specialist, N.C. Division of Aging, 708 Hillsborough St., Raleigh, N.C. 27603, 919-733-3963.

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Cousins Nakia and Eugenia Pearson, clad in their Sunday best, clasp spiffily dressed teddy bears won for them at Carowinds by Eugenia's father, Raymond, Raymond and Maxine Pearson and their two year old

daughter live on S. Smallwood Place. Nakia and her mom are staying with them until their house is finished. (Photo By Audrey Lodato)

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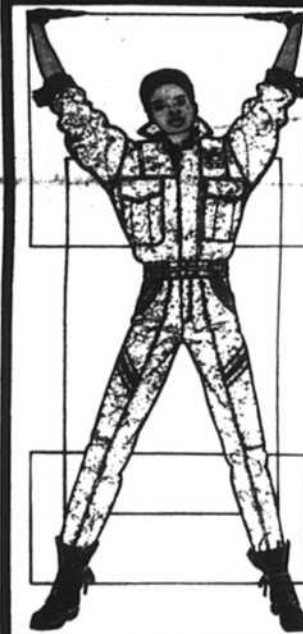
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