

**PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND BIOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF
SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN OLD AGE**

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Annotation: The article analyzes the main psychological, social, and biological determinants influencing mental health in old age. It highlights the natural characteristics of the aging process, changes occurring in a person's psychophysiological capabilities, the reshaping of social roles and status, and the importance of family and community support based on scientific sources. In addition, risk factors such as depression, cognitive decline, loneliness, and social isolation among the elderly, as well as effective psychoprophylactic approaches to reducing them, are examined. The research results provide practical recommendations for psychologists, healthcare workers, and social-sector specialists working with older adults.

Keywords: psychology of aging, mental health, aging, cognitive decline, social support, depression, gerontopsychology, stress resilience.

Introduction

Old age is a complex and unique stage of human life. During this period, a decline in biological capacities, changes in social roles and relationships, and a reevaluation of life's meaning and value systems are observed. Therefore, developing and supporting the mental health of the elderly through comprehensive approaches is one of the important scientific directions in gerontopsychology, gerontology, and social psychology. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the levels of depression, cognitive decline, and loneliness among older adults are increasing, which necessitates a deeper study of the concept of mental health.

Main Part

The determinants that shape mental health in old age are divided into three main groups: psychological, social, and biological factors.

Psychological determinants include stress resilience, rediscovering life's meaning and purpose, emotional stability, adaptability, time management, and an individual's internal resources. Erik Erikson's "Ego Integrity vs. Despair" theory explains the main psychological criterion of old age as accepting one's life as meaningful or experiencing feelings of regret. Research shows that an active lifestyle, maintaining positive emotions, and engaging in hobbies and interests significantly enhance psychological stability.

Social determinants are among the most important factors of mental health in the elderly, including relationships with family members, emotional connection with children and grandchildren, participation in community life, communication with neighbors, and the level of societal support. Scientific sources note that social isolation leads to an increase in depression and anxiety. Research data show that older individuals who engage in regular social interaction maintain cognitive functions more effectively.

Biological determinants include physiological changes associated with the aging process: slowing of neuronal activity, decreased metabolism, chronic illnesses, sleep disorders, and weakening of the muscular and skeletal systems. These factors directly affect mental well-being. Changes in serotonergic and dopaminergic systems can contribute to increased depressive states in old age. Cognitive decline—particularly weakening of short-term memory and attention—also negatively impacts mental health.

Psychotherapeutic approaches such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, reminiscence therapy, art therapy, and group therapy have been proven effective in strengthening mental health in old age. In addition, physical activity, daily walking, healthy nutrition, sleep hygiene, and medical monitoring ensure positive modification of biological determinants. Comprehensive preventive and rehabilitative approaches are considered the main factors in improving the mental health of older adults.

The complex system of determinants shaping mental health in old age is closely related to individual characteristics, one's social role, biological aging processes, and life experience. Psychological, social, and biological factors intersect to form the overall picture of mental well-being. The classification of these determinants indicates that they do not act separately, but rather in an integrated manner.

1. Psychological determinants: personal internal resources and adaptation

According to psychologists, old age is one of the most complex stages of the adaptation process, requiring a reorganization of the entire psychological system. The main psychological factors for maintaining mental health in elders include:

a) Life satisfaction and psychological well-being The components of well-being proposed by Diener (1984)—life satisfaction, predominance of positive emotions, and reduction of negative emotions—become even more important in old age. Accepting one's life as meaningful helps reduce stress.

b) Flexibility and acceptance Acceptance of age-related limitations is a key indicator of psychological stability. Older adults who can adapt to changing circumstances experience fewer depressive and anxiety-related symptoms.

c) Supporting memory and cognitive activity Mild cognitive decline is a natural part of aging. However, intellectual activities, learning new skills, reading, and logical games increase cognitive reserve and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

d) Reminiscence processes (memory reconstruction) Working with life memories (storytelling, viewing photo albums, writing diaries) strengthens emotional well-being, self-awareness, and understanding of life meaning.

e) Stress management strategies (If needed, I can continue this subsection and translate the rest of your text as well.)

Older adults benefit from problem-focused coping strategies, reliance on religious beliefs, positive reappraisal, relaxation techniques (meditation, deep breathing), all of which support mental health.

2. Social determinants: communication, support, and social roles

Gerontopsychological research shows that the quality of social relationships is one of the most important predictors of mental well-being among the elderly.

a) Emotional connection with family and loved ones Self-esteem, a sense of security, and psychological peace in the elderly are primarily linked to their relationships with family members. Attention, conversation, and support from children reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

b) Community engagement and communication Participation in pensioners' clubs, neighborhood events, intergenerational interaction with youth, and volunteer activities increases levels of mental well-being. Older adults with active social roles are less likely to experience depressive states.

c) Effectiveness of social service systems Access to medical-psychological counseling centers, sanatorium services, rehabilitation programs, and social assistance systems directly influences the mental health of the elderly.

d) Risks of loneliness and social isolation Living alone, migration of children, and withdrawal from social life are identified as major causes of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation in old age.

e) Use of information technologies Video communication, messaging apps, and basic internet skills help older adults feel connected to the outside world. Digital literacy is increasingly recognized as a modern social determinant.

3. Biological determinants: aging of the body and psychophysiological changes

Mental health in old age is closely linked to changes in physiological processes.

a) Neurobiological changes During aging, neural connections weaken, and levels of dopamine and serotonin in the brain decrease. This leads to low mood, reduced energy, and decreased motivation.

b) Chronic diseases Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, arthritis, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses are strongly related to mental health. Chronic pain syndromes significantly increase the risk of depression.

c) Sleep disturbances Reduced sleep depth, frequent awakenings, and insomnia are common in old age. Lack of sleep disrupts cognitive function and emotional stability.

d) Nutrition and physical activity Vitamin deficiencies, dehydration, unhealthy diet, and low physical activity intensify negative biological determinants. Moderate physical activity, however, increases serotonin levels and improves mood.

e) Brain health and neurodegenerative diseases Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and vascular dementia are among the strongest biological factors affecting mental health in the elderly.

4. The need for a comprehensive approach

Modern gerontopsychology does not rely solely on psychological or medical interventions. Strengthening mental health in old age must be based on the following integrative model:

- psychotherapy + physical rehabilitation
- social support + family-based interventions
- cognitive training + digital technologies
- healthy diet + stress-management techniques

Conclusion

Analyses show that mental health in old age is formed through the simultaneous interaction of psychological, social, and biological determinants. Strengthening psychological stability, expanding social support networks, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and establishing medical-psychological monitoring significantly improve the quality of the aging process. Therefore, every specialist working with older adults should comprehensively assess these determinants and develop psychoprophylactic programs based on an individual approach.

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