

The Influence of Education on Aging and Depression

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Education is important because it gives knowledge, shapes character, builds social relationship skills, and opens up the possibility of better job opportunities. The way education is directly important to well-being early in life is because it lays a foundation of knowledge upon which to build a life. It provides us with knowledge about ourselves and others, and the world in which we live. Education brings out and nurtures latent talents. It teaches us to think outside the box and dream of things bigger and beyond ourselves. Education enriches life and fosters new growth and development. Education teaches us to question who, what, where, when, why, and how. Education gives us the tools we need to gather and organize information to make better-informed choices and decisions. Knowledge places one in a better position to know what needs to be done and how to do it. Education empowers.

Depression is less frequent in people with higher levels of education. Several studies have endeavored to determine the relationship between education and risk for depression among the elderly. A comparison between elderly people with more and less education shows those with less education have a higher risk for depression.^[1] Among various socioeconomic levels (including education, income, and occupation), education has been found to be most robust.^[2,3] Less years of education are associated with an increased risk of late-life depression. Education is an intervening or mediating variable for other elderly problems besides depression.

There is substantial interaction between educational level, isolation and loneliness, and reduced or delayed recall.^[4] Results of one study shows how isolation and loneliness are associated with poorer recall, but only among those with low levels of education.⁴ In those elderly with higher education, regular Internet use, no functional impairment, few or no depressive symptoms, and no diabetes, digital literacy (predicts better performance in delayed recall) may help reduce cognitive decline.^[5]

Another study examined the educational gradients in a group of elderly diagnosed with depression in an attempt to identify the underlying mechanisms that might

reveal how education affects depression. Different pathways were found to link education to depression. Individual cognitive abilities, economic resources, social status, social network, and health behaviors were all relevant pathways to explain all of the education gradients.^[2] The single most important pathway is through developing cognitive ability which is where education provides essential intellectual and cerebral activation, stimulation, and mental engagement. A third study relates depression to a sense of control where the individual exerts power over various aspects of his/her own life and immediate environment.^[3] In the life-cycle of adulthood, middle-aged well-being is favored based upon ones employment status, marital status and household income which purveys a sense of control of one's life. When time, age, and illness bequeath physical dysfunction and a low sense of control representative of old-age decline, old-age depression is likely.^[3]

How do years of education mediate depression in the latter years? Educational attainment influences depression through the pathways of cognitive capability, skills, and capacity. Early, continuous, and life-long learning promotes and sustains healthy brain activity. We must remember however, although less education is commonly viewed as a risk factor for late life depression, this has not been unequivocally confirmed.^[1]

Reference

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