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Titel: Tracing the Origins of Successful Aging: The Role of Childhood Conditions and Societal Context

Abstract: This study investigates the role of childhood conditions and societal context in older Europeans' propensity to age successfully, controlling for later life risk factors. Successful aging was assessed following Rowe and Kahn's conceptualization, using baseline interviews from the first two waves of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). These data were merged with retrospective life-histories of participants from 13 Continental European countries, collected in 2008-09 as part of the SHARELIFE project. Our sample consists of 22,474 men and women, who are representative of the non-institutionalized population aged 50 or older (mean age: 63.3) in their respective country. Estimating multilevel logistic models, we controlled for demographics (age, sex), childhood conditions (SES, health, cognition), later life risk factors (various dimensions of SES and health behaviors), as well as country-level measures of public social expenditures and social inequality. There is a dependent association of childhood living conditions with elders' odds of aging well. Higher parental SES, better math and reading skills, as well as self-reports of good childhood health were positively associated with successful aging, even if contemporary characteristics were controlled for. Later-life SES and health behaviors exhibited the expected correlations with our dependent variable. Moreover, higher levels of public social expenditures and lower levels of income inequality were associated with a greater probability to meet Rowe and Kahn's successful aging criterion. We conclude that unfavorable childhood conditions exhibit a harmful influence on individuals' chances to age well across all European welfare states considered in this study.
Policy interventions should thus aim at improving the conditions for successful aging throughout the entire life-course.

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Occurences:
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