

LIFE BEYOND 80: WHAT PROVIDES MEANING AND SATISFACTION

This is an exploratory study examining what provides meaning and satisfaction for persons age 80 and older. Meaning is defined as what has value, purpose, and significance. Satisfaction is defined as feeling contented, feeling fulfilled, and experiencing pleasure.

Eight participants were interviewed using open ended questions that focused on physical health, family of origin experiences, religious orientation, economic status, marital relationships, relationships with children and grandchildren, current living situation, and feelings and attitudes about aging and death.

The eight participants in this study were all Caucasians, in relatively good health, economically secure, maintained satisfying relationships with their adult children, continued to enjoy activities, were satisfied with their living situations, were concerned about world events and focused on living in the present. Having lived through two significant socio-cultural events in history, namely the Great Depression and World War II, these participants' individual personalities reflect the qualities of courage, endurance, and resilience. Possessing these qualities enabled them to overcome tragedies and losses which enhanced their self-esteem.

Meaning and satisfaction for these participants was found in their relationships with their families and friends, continuing to be active and involved in living, experiencing their sense of self as being contiguous over their life span, and being satisfied with the persons they are.