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Prevention is the key - a multidimensional model for social well-being of the elderly

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Our research group identified a huge need for research on social well-being in the elderly population. In Hungary so far not much has been published in this topic, however, understanding the key elements of well-being is a growing area of research in gerontology all around the world, since it is crucial how we manage our lives in old age.

Well-being is a difficult concept to define and one of the central objectives of positive psychology, to create a thorough definition and identify the building blocks of it. Keyes (2002) created an integrative mental health model where three well-being dimensions that the model brings together and from which the "health syndrome" is built are emotional, psychological and social well-being. We build our model around Keyes' model of social well-being. In his model Social Integration is the first building block, the assessment of the individual's relationship to the community and society. The second dimension is Social Acceptance, which is about the evaluation of the people who make up the social environment and the trust in others. The Social Actualization dimension of social well-being means the degree of faith in the development of communities and society. Finally, the last element of the model, Social Coherence,

characterizes the individual of how well he is able to see and process the structure and understand the functioning of the world.

In this poster we aim to identify the most important areas for prevention of old-age problems. After thorough research of the literature of social well-being we identified several areas that are suggested as key components of social well-being, creating a multidimensional model of it. For example, both the size of the social network and the perceived support are of great importance in our lives and contribute to the assessment of our well-being. The size of the social network and the degree of perceived social support has a huge effect on the subjective experience of well-being in the elderly. Intrapsychic factors, such as personality traits, also play a huge role. Many researchers identify special patterns of the Big-5 dimensions of the elderly related to a positive or negative subjective experience of social well-being. The life of elderly people is further complicated by the fact that, as the years pass by, their social relationships are narrowing as by losing many significant others by natural losses. That is why awareness is very important in this area, so that we can help them to find new relationships alleviating their loneliness. For this, social programs are needed, which can be visited for free and which provides help to rebuild a network of relationships.

In the absence of companions, a person is much more vulnerable to mental illnesses such as depression. This is a particularly problematic area for the elderly, because old age dementias and depression overlap symptomatically, and separating them is often a challenge for professionals. Family relationships will be especially important in the lives of this age group. The family's supportive attitude and harmonious family relationships protect the individual against the development of depressive symptoms.

The quality of life can be further improved by a relationship with a companion animal (e.g. dogs, cats) as contact with them keeps older people active and provides a source of pleasure. Nowadays, we almost automatically associate the importance of exercise with the topic of well-being. This is no different in the case of social well-being, as physical activity is not only useful from a physiological point of view, but also helps maintain or renew our social relationships as it increases the frequency of our social relationships.