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## Victory for Victor Meldrew, as pessimistic people 'live longer'

It may be an unfamiliar concept to them, but the Victor Meldrews of the world finally have something to rejoice about.

Richard Wilson as Victor Meldrew in One Foot in the Grave Photo: BBC

By Hannah Furness

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Older people blighted by pessimism and fear for the future are more likely to live longer, according to scientists.

A study, into 40,000 adults across ten years, has found those with low expectations for a “satisfying future” actually led healthier lives.

In contrast, people who were “overly optimistic” about the days ahead had a greater risk of disability or death within ten years.

The extraordinary research, published by the American Psychological Association, will not doubt prove comfort to anyone with a tendency to grumpiness.

Frieder R. Lang, lead author of the study from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany, said: “Our findings revealed that being overly optimistic in predicting a better future was associated with a greater risk of disability and death within the following decade.

"Pessimism about the future may encourage people to live more carefully, taking health and safety precautions."

The research, based on data collected between 1993 and 2003, asked 40,000 respondents to rate how satisfied they believed they would be in five years time.

They were interviewed again five years later, and their satisfaction levels compared with their own predictions.

Those who overestimated how happy they would be were found to have a 9.5 per cent increase in reporting disabilities, and a ten per cent high risk of death.

Older people, who tended to have a “darker outlook” on the future, were shown to be the most accurate in their predictions, with optimistic youngsters overestimating their success.

"Unexpectedly, we also found that stable and good health and income were associated with expecting a greater decline compared with those in poor health or with low incomes," said Dr Lang.

"Moreover, we found that higher income was related to a greater risk of disability.

"We argue, though, that the outcomes of optimistic, accurate or pessimistic forecasts may depend on age and available resources.

"These findings shed new light on how our perspectives can either help or hinder us in taking actions that can help improve our chances of a long healthy life."

Of those interviewed, 43 percent of the oldest group were found to have underestimated their future life satisfaction, 25 percent had predicted accurately and 32 percent had overestimated, according to the study

Research published last year by the Office for National Statistics found most people are now living six years longer than current life expectancy projections, with no sign of an upper age limit.

Previous studies have suggested that “unrealistic optimism” about the future can help people feel better while facing inevitable negative outcomes, such as terminal disease.

Another, published in 2009, noted that a positive outlook depended largely on where one lives, with those in London being the grumpiest and those in the countryside being the most relaxed.

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