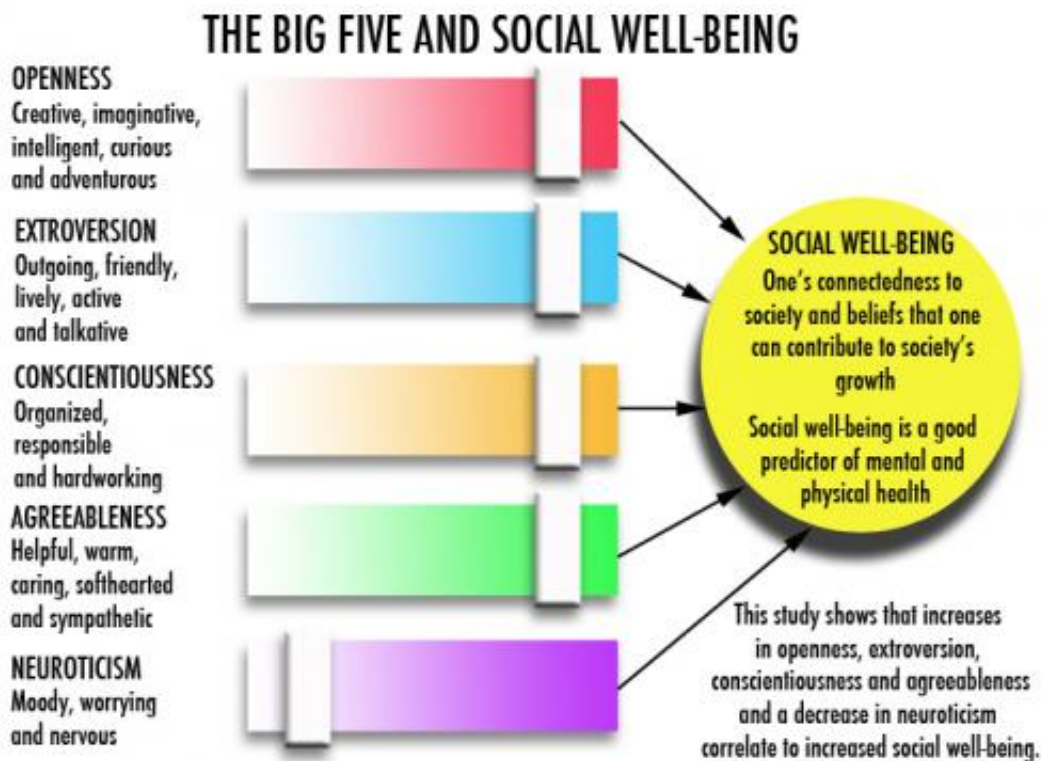


Study links personality changes to changes in social well-being

December 19 2012, by Chelsey Coombs



Researchers show that certain personality traits are associated with higher social well-being. Credit: Chelsey B. Coombs

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers report that changes in social well-being are closely tied to one's personality, with positive changes in one corresponding to similar changes in the other. Their study reveals potential new mechanisms that can help individuals thrive as they age.

Their findings appear in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Psychologists often use the "big five" traits – extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness and [neuroticism](#) – to describe personality. A person who scores high in extroversion, for example, is highly outgoing, friendly and active. Those who score high in conscientiousness are organized, responsible and hardworking. Although previous studies have shown that these traits tend to stabilize over time, evidence also has shown that they can change as a person ages.

Social well-being is related to an individual's connectedness to the larger community and the belief that he or she can contribute to society's growth. It is a good predictor of general mental and [physical health](#), and people with higher social

well-being often are more civically engaged and are more apt to behave in a pro-social manner.

University of Illinois [psychology professor](#) Brent Roberts and [postdoctoral researcher](#) Patrick Hill used data from the Mid-Life Development in the U.S. (MIDUS) study to determine how the Big Five personality traits and social well-being of adults relate to each other over time.

"We all know people who we get along with well and the characteristics of those people," Hill said. "And the question is how that kind of social well-being, that kind of [social connectedness](#), might coincide with those dispositional characteristics that are in the kinds of people that we like to seek out in the world."

In the MIDUS study, participants answered survey questions to determine their big five personality traits and social well-being on two separate occasions about nine years apart.

An analysis of the responses revealed that adult social well-being is linked to personality over time. Those who scored higher on extroversion, [agreeableness](#), conscientiousness, emotional stability and [openness](#) had higher social well-being. Those who gained in these traits over time often showed comparable gains in their social well-being.

"If you change the traits that help you in your social life, your social life also improves. Similarly, if you improve your social life, you're going to see the benefits with respect to an improvement in your disposition," Hill said.

Roberts believes that the application of these results can lead to benefits as people age.

"This shows that social well-being and social structures are related to personality development, which is also related to thriving health," he said. "So this is identifying a whole new pathway through which some of these mechanisms might actually help older people thrive."

The paper, "Examining Concurrent and Longitudinal Relations Between [Personality Traits](#) and Social Well-Being in Adulthood," is available [online](#).

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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