

Labor Participation and Subjective Well-being of Older Adult: A Systematic Literature Review

Li Xia¹, Noradilah Md Nordin²

Abstract

The consequence of the rapid aging population has received widespread attention globally. Recently, much attention has been given to the active aging population that exists in the elderly population who are currently working or employed. Therefore, this systematic literature review (SLR) investigates the empirical evidence on the association of older adults' labor participation and subjective well-being. Specifically, two main objectives of this study i.e., examine relationship between labor participation and subjective well-being, and other factors affecting older adults' subjective well-being. We used the PRISMA systematic literature review protocol and searched from two databases (i.e., Scopus and Web of Science) in March 2024. Fourteen studies were included in this SLR. Five studies assessed the effect of personal attributes such gender, income, media use, and marital status on older adults' subjective well-being and eleven articles assessed the increase of labor participation/social participation on subjective well-being of older adults. Two of the articles simultaneously assessed the impact of personal attributes and labor participation/social participation on subjective well-being. The reported findings were classified into personal attributes, labor participation, and subjective well-being. The results of the study show that most researchers believe that older adults' labor participation/ social participation and personal attributes are highly correlated with older adults' subjective well-being.

Keywords: *Labor Participation, Social Participation, Subjective Well-being, Older Adults.*

Introduction

As the world's population continues to age, there is a growing concern to improve the well-being of older adults. Concurrently, there is increasing discussion about the employment and participation of the elderly in the context of active aging. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022), projects that the percentage of the global population aged 65 years or over will increase from 10 percent in 2022 to 16 percent by 2050. Therefore, this condition has led to greater interest in understanding the relationship between elderly employment and their subjective well-being. Diener (1984) initially introduced the concept of subjective well-being, which refers to an individual's comprehensive evaluation of their quality of life, based on their perceptions and judgments. It comprises cognitive (satisfaction with life) and emotion (positive and negative emotions) components. Besides, Ryff et al. (1995) emphasized that well-being demands the realization of one's potential, resulting in a sense of achievement and gratification. Ming & Chengyi (2003) proposed that subjective well-being encompasses an individual's evaluation of their material and spiritual life. Hence, subjective well-being can be understood as an individual's overall satisfaction with life based on their perceptions and judgments.

According to Marx (1995), labor is the process of interaction between humans and nature, where humans regulate and control the material exchange with nature through their activities. The definition of labor in this study is based on Marx's concept of productive labor, i.e., labor that creates surplus value, and does not include labor in the broader sense of doing chores or volunteering in one's own home. In this paper, labor participation refers specifically to the act of participating in productive labor, i.e., the act of participating in all labor other than domestic and voluntary family work, including wage-earning labor, self-employment, or private economic activities, etc. Additionally, the concept of labor participation and subjective well-being of older adults can be effectively explained by activity theory. According to this theory, social participation assigns social roles to individuals (Havighurst 1953). In their prime, individuals take on mandatory roles assigned by society, and in old age, the lack of these roles negatively affects their well-being. However, the older adults who continue to engage in social activities and take on non-mandatory

¹ Centre for Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah. Department of Business, Hebei Minzu Normal University.

² Centre for Human Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah, Email:noradilah@umpsa.edu.my (Corresponding Author).

task linked with healthy mental health. Engaging in moderately difficult and manageable activities can influence high levels of subjective well-being (Thoits, 1982). Diener (1984) have argued that people are happier when they engage in interesting and engaging activities. This suggests that happiness comes from behavior, rather than just achieving a goal. These two theories, Havighurst's and Diener's perspectives, can be combined to help us understand people better.

The concept of labor participation with subjective well-being explained by the theoretical perspectives above was also supported by empirical studies. For example, a study has found that work induces positive emotions through a variety of pathways, such as humor, progress, meeting others' expectations, building a positive self-image, and acquiring knowledge (Laane et al., 2013). Douglas et al. (2017) argued that older adults should actively participate in social activities, which can effectively improve the physical condition of older adults, as well as facilitate the establishment of close relationships with individuals around them, help older adults to expand the circle of interactions, and help to enhance the satisfaction of older adults with their lives, which is beneficial to older adults' lives. Rong (2020) also argued that social participation has a positive effect on older adults and that regular participation in social activities improves depression, loneliness, and anxiety among older adults and promotes a healthy level of psychological status. Research has shown that over 60% of older adults in Europe choose to work not just for the financial income it brings, but to stay connected to society and to realize their self-worth through their work (Burgess et al., 2013).

Despite many previous studies on association between labor participation and subjective well-being outcomes, the systematic literature review on the associations between the two variables remains underexplored. Existing studies showed mixed findings, with some suggesting positive correlations due to labor participation and subjective well-being (Yang et al., 2024), while other studies have emphasized that labor participation can have a potentially negative impact on older adults' subjective well-being leading up to retirement (Asselmann & Specht, 2024). Thus, this study seeks to clarify these associations, addressing critical gap in the literature. Such analysis would not only enrich research on the subjective well-being and health of older persons, but also provide new perspectives for research on human resource development. Therefore, this paper aims to fill this gap with two main research questions as follows:

What is the relationship between labor participation and subjective well-being? This question aims to analyze the association between various dimensions of older adults' labor participation and their subjective well-being. We reviewed the findings and data from other researchers to assess the direction and strength of the relationship.

What are the other factors affecting the subjective well-being? This question seeks to identify the other factors influencing the subjective well-being of older adults through a systematic analysis of relevant academic literature.

In this paper, we detail the research methodology used for the SLR, presentation of results and discussion, conclusion and recommendation, and research limitation and future studies direction. By employing comprehensive SLR, it is hope that the finding provides a holistic view about the topic and contribute to the broader discussion on how to improve older adults' subjective well-being especially to policymakers, health practitioners, administration, and related stakeholders in public health services.

Research Method

In order to address the research questions, this paper employed a systematic literature review (SLR) on the association between labor participation and subjective well-being with older adults as the main focus. The SLR is a method to synthesize existing knowledge, identify future research directions, and provide answers to questions that cannot be adequately addressed by a single study (Page et al., 2021). We followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol for conducting a thorough review (Moher et al., 2015). The data for this study was collected through database searches, which were divided into three stages: initial search, abstract screening, and full-text review. The search was

performed using Scopus and Web of Science databases based on specific inclusion criteria summarized in Table 1 to ensure high-quality results.

Firstly, we searched using older adults' subjective well-being and labor participation as keywords. Eligibility criteria were based on official publication standards and subject relevance. Only articles published in English in scholarly journals between 2013 and 2024 were included. In addition, the articles had to be directly related to academic fields such as psychology and social sciences. Specifically, the two databases were first searched using the keywords “older adults” and “subjective well-being”, and there were 701 relevant journal articles. After adding “labor participation” or “social participation” or “employment” as the second keyword, the number of articles was reduced to 59.

Secondly, we then perform abstract screening, and only English language journal articles relevant to psychology and social sciences were included for further review. A total of 24 and 2 articles originated from Scopus and Web of Science databases, respectively. The full text was then read to assess whether subjective well-being and labor participation or social participation among older adults were the main themes of the articles. After a critical review, 12 publications were rejected, and 14 publications (12 Scopus and 2 Web of Science publications) were left to be analyzed (Figure .1)

Table 1. Eligibility and inclusion labelling

Standard type	Inclusion criteria	Identified Articles
Key Terms	“Older adults” and “Subjective well-being”	701
Second key term	“Labor participation” or “Social participation” or “Employment”	59
Year of publication	Between 2013 and 2024	56
Research area	Psychology, Sociology	28
Language	English	27
Type of publication	Journal article	26

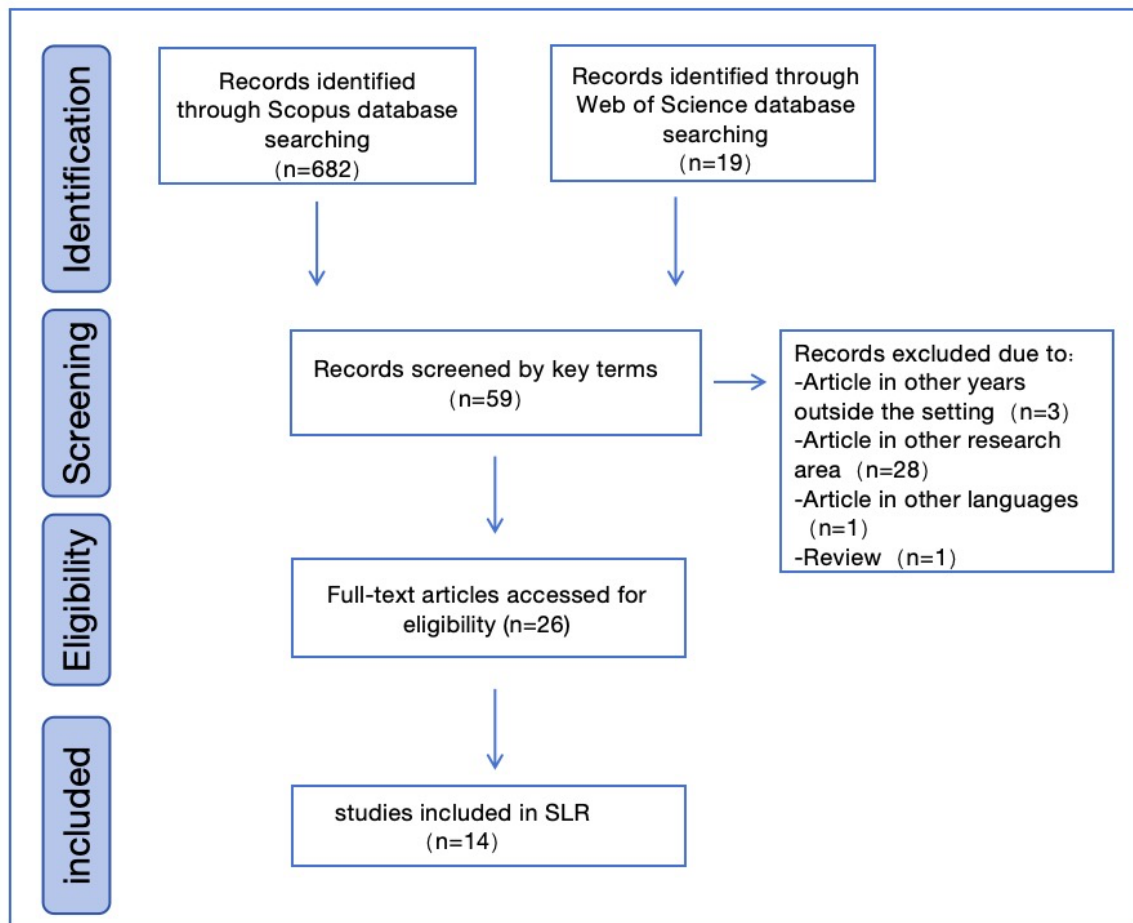


Figure 1: Literature Review Flow using PRISMA method.

Result and Discussion

This paper provides a review of the literature on the relationship between the subjective well-being of older adults and their participation in labor participation. Table 2 presents a summary of the findings regarding the correlation between subjective well-being and labor participation (including social participation and employment) among older adults. Based on the review of 14 articles, it was concluded that most researchers agree that the labor participation and the employment status, of older adults are strongly associated with their subjective well-being. Additionally, various factors such as social support, income, and media usage were identified as influencing the subjective well-being of older adults. We divided result and discussion into two parts which are 1) relationship between labor participation and subjective well-being in older adults, and 2) other factors affecting subjective well-being of older people.

Table 2. Summary of Literature

No	Author	Year	Title	Country	Participant	Results/Findings
1	Liu et al.	2020	Subjective well-being of older adult internal migrants in China: The role of social environment	China	470 internal migrants in Dongguan, China (age range = 60-87 years)	The subjective well-being of elderly individuals who are mobile is influenced by their personal attributes such as marital status, employment status, and pensioner status, as well as

						the social environment, including perceived social support, social cohesion, and social participation. Social support has a greater impact on subjective well-being than personal attributes.
2	Takeuhi & Katagiri	2024	Effects of workplace ageism on negative perception of aging and subjective well-being of older adults according to gender and employment status	Japan	600 participants with age range between 60 and 74 years old	Result found that workplace ageism was directly associated with lower subjective well-being and higher negative self-perceptions of aging. Then, age, education, subjective health status and subjective economic status were controlled in a mediation analysis. Results found that, indirect effects of ageism on the subjective well-being were significant via negative self-perceptions of aging.
3	Chia & Hartanto	2021	Older Adult Employment Status and Well-Being: A Longitudinal Bidirectional Analysis	Singapore	695 persons consisting of persons over 55 years of age	According to the study, employment does not significantly impact the well-being of respondents when considering intra-personal factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status. However, the study concluded that subject well-being, particularly social meaning, and personal growth, leads to employment among older people.
4	Muhammad et al.	2021	Association of self-perceived income status with psychological distress and subjective well-being: a cross-sectional study among older adults in India	India	9852 elders from older adult's household in rural and urban areas	The study revealed that older adults with income partially sufficient to meet their basic needs were more likely to experience psychological distress and lower subjective well-being compared to older adults with perceived sufficient income. Additionally, older adults who had never worked

						were more likely to experience psychological distress than those who are currently employed. Moreover, older adults who owned assets and those who did not both exhibited higher psychological distress and lower subjective well-being.
5	Asselmann & Specht	2024	Working Life as a Double-Edged Sword: Opposing Changes in Subjective Well-Being Surrounding the Transition to Work and Retirement	German	2,007 (expected) retirees	The study revealed that levels of life satisfaction and emotional well-being among older adults declined in the years leading up to retirement. However, this level was higher in the years following retirement, possibly due to the disappearance of job-related stress.
6	Chan et al.	2024	Associations among social participation types, mental and subjective well-being in Chinese older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic	Hongkong	341 participants aged 55–95 years in Hong Kong	Different types of social interaction can contribute to the well-being of older individuals in China in several ways. Cultural and religious activities can promote the emotional well-being of older individuals by enhancing positive emotions. In addition, recreational activities appear to alleviate anxiety levels among older individuals.
7	Yang et al.	2024	Social participation and subjective well-being among older adults in China: the mediation effect of media use	China	938 persons aged 60 and over in China	This study found that, older people with higher levels of social participation have higher levels of media use. At the same time, older people with high media use also had higher subjective well-being.
8	Nakagomi et al.	2023	Social isolation and subsequent health and well-being in older adults: A longitudinal	Japan	Elderly persons aged 65 or older not receiving public long-	The study found that social isolation, particularly social interaction with friends and social participation, may affect the health and

			outcome-wide analysis		term care insurance benefits	well-being of older adults and be an important factor in promoting health and well-being.
9	Lu et al.	2023	Synergistic Impacts of online and offline social participation on older adults' subjective well-being: evidence from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging	Canada	Persons aged 55 years and over in the Canadian Longitudinal Study of Aging data	Reducing loneliness is crucial for improving the life satisfaction of the elderly. The effect of participating in online social activities on the happiness of the elderly is influenced by their engagement in offline activities. This study suggest that it is important to promote the combined integration of both online and offline social involvement among the elderly.
10	Lin et al.	2023	The positive effects of activity involvement on the subjective well-being of Chinese older adults: a moderated effects model	Taiwan	332 Elderly Chinese	The study indicated that engaging in employment and participating in social activities are beneficial for the subjective well-being of elderly individuals in China. The support and care provided by family members are crucial, as they can strengthen the positive association between participation in family chores and the well-being of the elderly. Additionally, the elderly's participation in social activities can also have an impact on their interpersonal self-concept.
11	Sirbu et al.	2022	Determinants of subjective well-being among European Union's older adults	Romania	41,490 older persons	The researchers found that, higher income, higher education level, and better health are all significantly associated with subjective well-being. Additionally, being alone in old age is negatively related with subjective well-being.

12	Dury et al.	2021	Gender-related differences in the relationship between social and activity participation and health and subjective well-being in later life	Belgium	80 participants aged 60 or over in Belgium	The study indicated that, engaging in social oriented activities was significantly associated to lower physical deterioration and higher well-being. Additionally, volunteering was associated with increased subjective well-being.
13	Kim et al.	2017	Subjective Well-Being in Older Chinese and Korean Immigrants in the United States: Effects of Self-Rated Health and Employment Status	America	171 Chinese elderly immigrants and 205 Korean elderly immigrants in Los Angeles County	Results yielded that self-rated health was correlated with subjective well-being in both Korean and Chinese immigrants. Besides, employment, education, and age were correlated with subjective well-being for older Korean immigrants only.
14	Kim et al.	2015	The impact of employment and self-rated economic condition on the subjective well-being of older Korean immigrants	America	A total of 205 elderly Korean immigrants aged between 65 and 90 years old in Los Angeles	The researchers found a positive correlation between employment and self-rated economic status associated with the subjective well-being of older Korean immigrants in the United States. They also found that the interaction between employment status and self-rated economic status significantly impacted their subjective well-being.

Relationship between Labor Participation and Subjective Well-Being in Older Adults.

This paper reviewed an analysis of various viewpoints on subjective well-being and labor participation in old age across different countries, including the United States, Germany, Singapore, China, Japan, and others. It becomes evident that labor participation significantly influences the subjective well-being of older adults in unique and meaningful ways. Most articles suggest that older adults' labor participation is positively related to their subjective well-being. Recent empirical evidence by Chao et al., (2024) argued that promoting different types of social interaction, such as cultural activities, religious activities, and recreational activities, can contribute to the well-being of older adults in China in various aspects. This finding is similar with Nakagomi et al. (2023), which found that interaction with friends and social engagement reduced depressive symptoms and promoted health and well-being in older adults.

Several studies have found that older adults who have never worked are more likely to experience psychological distress than those who have worked (Muhammad et al., 2021). However, if older adults experience ageism in the workplace, this can significantly reduce their subjective well-being (Takeuhi & Katagiri, 2024). Chia & Hartanto (2021) argues that well-being, especially the significance of social and

personal growth, leads to employment among older people. Working beyond the traditional retirement age may have mental health benefits.

In addition, we found that factors such as income, gender and media use status play a moderating role in older adults' subjective well-being and labor participation. Takeuhi & Katagiri (2024) found that there are differences in the effects of social participation and retirement on health between men and women. The favorable effects of social participation were less prominent among women than men. The effect of social participation on life satisfaction was higher in males than in females. Muhammad et al. (2021) in his survey found that the level of subjective well-being of older adults whose income was sufficient to meet their basic needs was 2.33 times higher than that of older adults whose income only partially met their basic needs. In addition, it was found that media use affects the frequency of social participation, which increases subjective well-being (Yang et al., 2024).

In contrast, some studies have found that retirement can have opposite effects. In a study by Asselmann & Specht (2024), it was discovered that in the five years leading up to retirement, older adults became less satisfied, less happy, sadder, and more anxious. However, in the first year of retirement and beyond, they reported feeling more satisfied, happier, less anxious, and less angry, supporting the idea of role strain. Furthermore, women in routine jobs are perceived to have shorter life expectancy and decreased happiness. Amending the mandatory retirement age for both male and female employees while considering gender differences is crucial to safeguarding the well-being and health of women (Lozano & Solé-Auró, 2021).

Other factors affecting subjective well-being of older people.

Researchers in the field of subjective well-being have suggested different influences on subjective well-being based on their findings. Among them, factors such as income, social support, and marital status have a greater influence on subjective well-being. In order to present the research results in recent years more clearly, this paper summarizes the factors affecting subjective well-being of the elderly from different dimensions.

Liu et al. (2020) argued that the subjective well-being of Chinese older adults is influenced by personal attributes (marital status, employment status, and pensioner status) and social environment (perceived social support, social cohesion, and social participation). The researchers indicated that social support is thought to have a greater impact on subjective well-being than personal attributes.

At the same time, social isolation, especially social interaction with friends and social participation, may affect the overall health and subjective well-being of older people. In particular, online and offline social engagement may indirectly increase life satisfaction by reducing loneliness (Lu et al., 2023). It can be seen that social support is thought to have a significant moderating effect and can mitigate the negative impact of loneliness on life satisfaction. Particularly for specific groups such as older adults with disabilities, disability predicts lower transient affect, well-being, and life satisfaction, which needs to be associated with more participation in activities with grandchildren, friends, and coworkers (Hsieh & Waite, 2019).

Another study similarly validated the important role of social support in the subjective well-being of older adults. Takeuhi & Katagiri (2024) found that age discrimination in the workplace exacerbated older adults' self-perceptions of aging and reduced their subjective well-being. When part-time women's subjective well-being is worsened by age discrimination in the workplace, they may quit their jobs. Therefore, there is a need to create a comfortable and age discrimination-free work environment for older workers. This is also supported by another study, Kim et al. (2017) in a study of 171 Chinese older immigrants and 205 Korean older immigrants in Los Angeles County, found that there is a need for population and employment opportunity development health promotion services for these two Asian older groups, especially for Korean older immigrants, to further support their subjective well-being.

Finally, income is recognized as another important factor influencing the subjective well-being of older adults. A hierarchical regression analysis yielded that self-rated financial condition and employment significantly impact subjective well-being while controlling four demographic characteristics (i.e., age,

gender, marital status, and education). Also, among the four demographic variables, age, marital status, and education explained the subjective well-being (Kim et al., 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendation

After reviewing the 14 articles, this study concludes that there is a strong association between subjective well-being of elderly and their participation in the workforce. Most studies acknowledge a clear positive correlation between the two, with some suggesting that retirement can improve the subjective well-being of the elderly. In addition, personal attribute factors such as gender, income, media use, and marital status have been thought to influence older adults' subjective well-being. Meanwhile, social support as an important factor influencing the subjective well-being of older adults has also received widespread attention. Thus, this review puts forward the following recommendations: the government and relevant institutions should formulate policies to support older adult labor participation, provide more flexible employment opportunities, create a comfortable and age-neutral working environment for older workers, and ensure that they are given the respect and support they deserve in their labor process. Also, it is important to regularly assess the effectiveness of relevant policies and measures to continually optimize and improve them. Lastly, communities and families should do a good job of providing health promotion services for older adults, assist in regular health check-ups and psychological counseling, encouraging older adults to actively participate in social activities, providing the necessary assistance and resources, and enhancing their social ties and sense of belonging.

Research Limitation and Future Studies Direction

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between labor participation and subjective well-being among older adults, there are some limitations. First, this study primarily relies on the Scopus database and Web of Science database, which may result in the omission of some important research. Therefore, it may be beneficial to expand the scope to include Google Scholar database to ensure a more comprehensive collection of relevant journal articles. Second, a small number of keywords were used in the search strings, and since the number of articles using the keyword "labor participation" was very limited, similar keywords such as "employment" and "social participation" were used in the searches. Some relevant studies using different keywords, such as "mental well-being", may not have been included. Similarly, the selected inclusion criteria had a time frame of 2013-2024, which may have left out some important studies. Lastly, the influence of cultural factors on the relationship between labor participation and subjective well-being has not been uniformly explored in the studies reviewed. Cultural norms and values can significantly influence older adults' perceptions and experiences of work, leading to potentially biased findings. By acknowledging these limitations, we hope to provide a transparent perspective for this study and encourage future researchers to expand their findings from a broader perspective.

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