The Singapore perspective

Adults who have a sense of purpose in life age better, and enjoy better health. That is what Singapore researchers found in a recent study.

Their paper on Purpose in Life in Older Adults was published in May in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. The study was conducted by researchers from three institutes: National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Institute of Mental Health.

The researchers defined purpose in life or PIL as a psychological construct that reflects one’s life goals and the desire or determination to pursue them. “While development of PIL is a lifelong process, studies evidenced that PIL tends to drop with old age,” they said in their paper.

Retirement, chronic illnesses and widowhood are associated with a decline in PIL, the researchers found. They also found evidence to suggest that having a purpose in life protects older adults against cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, disability, cardiovascular complications and death.

Linked to that is the finding that older adults who have a sense of purpose pay attention to their diet, exercise and physical health.

The researchers concluded that “helping older adults to develop or maintain a purpose in life is imperative given the rapidly ageing population across the globe”.

Venessa Lee