

Silver Starters and the impact on wellbeing



MSc Vitality & Ageing

Thesis

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Abstract

When it comes to evaluating how successful populations are at managing health, there is a trend towards wellbeing. Eudaimonic wellbeing is associated with mental and physical health which means that improvements increase population health. Focal areas of eudaimonic wellbeing are meaningfulness, connectedness and vitality. It has been shown that societal engagement, such as volunteer work or later life employment contributes to purpose in life and meaningfulness. In this sense, one potential beneficial intervention for eudaimonic wellbeing is fostering later life societal engagement through entrepreneurship. One way of achieving this is by encouraging participation in a startup course like Silver Starters. This paper investigates the impact of Silver Starters on the eudaimonic wellbeing of its participants.

We did so using qualitative and quantitative measures. Respondents (N = 40), completed Diener's Satisfaction With Life Scale and a single question about whether participants found that the course had impacted their wellbeing. Answers were recorded on a Likert-like scale. In-depth interviews were then conducted (N = 10) to investigate the impact from the participants' perspectives.

It was found that Silver Starters reported high levels of wellbeing that was even more positively impacted by participation. One of the reasons of these high levels of wellbeing were the proactive coping strategies participants demonstrated. Such coping strategies focused on personal growth and adaptation, for instance reflecting on experiences, seeking learning opportunities and putting things in perspective. Feelings of connectedness and meaningfulness were associated with vitality. This indicates that Silver Starters, next to providing entrepreneurial skills, enabled flourishing.

Introduction

Wellbeing is increasingly emerging as an important societal aspiration. Policy and policy evaluation of how successful individuals, institutions or populations are when it comes to ageing has increasingly been moving from wealth to wellbeing. This movement gained momentum when the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development started measuring wellbeing in its member countries in 2011. The reason behind this trend is the increase in life expectancy of populations, the prevalence of chronic diseases and the realization that focusing on what matters most to people impacts their wellbeing.

Wellbeing is associated with physical illness, research links depression and life stress with premature mortality, coronary heart disease, diabetes, disability and other chronic conditions.¹ Whilst the exact nature of these links is not fully understood, improving wellbeing seems a useful intervention to improve population health².

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing can be approached in diverse ways. In general, distinctions are made between eudaimonic wellbeing (life evaluation) and hedonic wellbeing (in the moment). Hedonic wellbeing refers to everyday feelings and moods such as feeling happy, sad or angry.³ It is relatively easy to manipulate these instantaneous sensations by 'quick fixes' such as watching a 'feel-good' film.

Eudaimonic wellbeing, on the other hand, is more evaluative and reflective, focusing on judgments about the meaning and purpose of one's life. This judging and evaluating requires cognitive processing, reflection over time and comparison with self-selected standards. Eudaimonic wellbeing is associated with psychological wellbeing. Distinctions can be made between languishing and flourishing⁴, the latter displaying high levels of eudaimonic wellbeing⁵. However, the ability to flourish is dependent on self-efficacy⁶ which refers to one's self-perceived capability to achieve a desired outcome. This involves the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, coping strategies and social environment.

When aiming to achieve improved population health, it makes sense to focus on eudaimonic wellbeing, because an individual's capacity to demonstrate resilience affects their lifestyle choices which, according to the WHO⁷, impacts 60% of an individual's health.

Wellbeing in older people

Although, as people age, a deterioration of health is apparent, wellbeing has actually been found to increase. This is known as the 'wellbeing paradox'⁸ and relates to an older person's resilience when dealing with life's adversities. Overall, however, changes in eudaimonic wellbeing have been found to be associated with changes in life circumstances, for instance bereavement or the work-to-retirement transition. This latter important transition has been shown to involve a process of psychologically and behaviorally distancing oneself from the workforce that is often accompanied by other social changes, which again influence health and wellbeing⁹.

One of the factors that has been shown to contribute successfully to improve wellbeing in older individuals is the involvement in leisure activities¹⁰ or community-based group interventions¹¹. These can significantly impact

an older person's physical, psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing¹². Having a purpose in life by means of fulfilling social roles has also been identified by Heaven¹³ as contributing towards a healthy work-retirement transition. The team analyzed over 9000 publications and found 11 descriptive studies that came to this conclusion. A review of the literature in 2020 conducted by a team of Spanish researchers¹⁴ found only limited research into wellbeing interventions of people transitioning into retirement. The research they did find largely focused on single lifestyle behavior instead of considering other and additional social determinants of health. Ambitions and wishes in later life seem related to life satisfaction, in which purpose in life may play an important role¹⁵. No specific studies have been found that investigate an intervention that proposes to address wellbeing in older people by means of a course in entrepreneurship. Indeed, Ryff¹⁶ recommends this as an area meriting further investigation because her model of eudaimonic wellbeing (see Annex E) highlights correlations between entrepreneurial activities and key dimensions affecting wellbeing such as autonomy, purpose in life or environmental mastery.

As it is, several studies have shown that later life employment is increasingly an ambition among 65+. More specifically, entrepreneurship seems to be a growing desire among those above 50. About 10-15% of the population seems to have this desire^{17,18}. Acting on these findings, Leyden Academy of Vitality & Ageing, together with EIT Health, ran Start-up Plus in 2019, a pilot course in entrepreneurship for 50 participants over the age of 50. In 2021, Leyden Academy of Vitality & Ageing, together with AEGON, repeated the undertaking, now called Silver Starters. The online entrepreneurial course provided about 100 people over the age of 50 the opportunity to participate in a free-of-charge intensive 8-week start-up course. An impact analysis was carried out investigating the impact of Silver Starters on perceived eudaimonic wellbeing. In specific, the following questions guided this impact research:

1) Did participation in Silver Starters have an impact on the individual's wellbeing?

2) How did participants evaluate this wellbeing?

3) How did participants feel that Silver Starters provided them with a tool to achieve eudaimonic outcomes in the future?

Methods

The research was carried out using a retrospective 'questerviews', mixed methods design. Questerviews are standardized questionnaires followed by semi-structured interviews. This is considered useful in conducting mixed methods health service research because the standardized items in the questionnaire can provide a trigger in producing richer data for subsequent semi-structured interviews.¹⁹ The research was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1) Completion of online questionnaire (N = 40)

On completion of the Silver Starter course, all participants (N = 95) were sent an online questionnaire via Survey Monkey. The questionnaire included questions on sociodemographic background such as gender educational status and questions about their evaluation of the course such as what aspects they particularly valued or felt challenged by.

In terms of wellbeing, we included the Diener 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)²⁰ which uses a 7-point Likert style response scale and can be found in Annex A). The SWLS has been validated internationally including The Netherlands and has high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.74²¹). The scale has previously been used in investigating eudaimonic outcomes²² although a discussion on the extent of SWLS's measurement potential for eudaimonic wellbeing still remains. The scores of the SWLS were obtained by adding the responses of the 5 questions by the 7 possible answers.

In addition to this indirect measurement, participants were asked in a single item question whether they felt that participating in Silver Starters had affected their subjective wellbeing, their answer also being recorded on a 7-point Likert style scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Single item measures in life satisfaction have been shown to highly correlate with more intricate and extensive scales²³ and can therewith reliably map experienced change in wellbeing.

Since the sample size was not large enough for extensive statistical analysis such as t-tests, descriptive analyses were carried out in SPSS (version 27). Main outcomes were the mean score on the total items of the SWLS and per item as well as the mean and percentage of the direct question 'this course changed my wellbeing'.

Phase 2) Semi-structured interviews (N = 10)

Qualitative interpretative research was carried out in the second part of this investigation. Questions were put together that would be used as a guide throughout the semi-structured interview. These questions are listed in Annex B). These questions were put together bearing in mind Ryff²⁴ suggested dimensions on entrepreneurship and eudaimonic wellbeing: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose-in-life and self-acceptance (see also Annex E).

For the qualitative interviews, we aimed to include a diverse group, taken into consideration potentially relevant characteristics such as sex, age and, to some extent, self-reported motivation for joining the programme. 16 participants of the Silver Starters programme indicated an interest in being interviewed about their wellbeing in the Survey Monkey questionnaire. 10 of these were chosen based on these inclusion criteria (see table 2). Interviews were held online via Microsoft Teams in Dutch and with permission recorded. The average duration of the interviews was 45 minutes (range 35 minutes to 50 minutes). All interviews were held by the author.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim which was coded in Atlas.ti9. Interviews, transcription, coding and interpretation were undertaken by the author, with input from the supervisor. The initial coding was manual, open, inductive and descriptive to allow for alternative interpretations. All interviews were initially coded over the short space of a few days, followed by a period of reflection and reading other research on the topic. This iterative process was repeated a number of times and the coding then became deductive in order to identify relevant themes, maintain consistency, accuracy and reliability.

Ethics

Individuals participating in the research did so voluntarily. Their input was provided anonymously in the case of the online questionnaires. Descriptive characteristics of the subjects who volunteered to participate in the interviews are limited and only used to aid the narrative. No data was shared with third parties.

Results

1) Quantitative findings

Table 1) provides a summary of the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents of the Survey Monkey questionnaire. The female participants largely outnumbered male participants, as in the larger group of the participants in Silver Starters. We found no significant statistical differences between the answers of females and males responding to the questionnaire. It is also noteworthy that all participants were relatively highly educated compared to the general population of 50+. Finally, Silver Starters attracted a diverse population in terms of engagement with employment. A little over a quarter was employed, 15% was retired, 17.5% had their own business already and 12.5% was unemployed. According to Brower²⁵ this could be expected to influence the coping mechanisms displayed when trying to achieve wellbeing.

Table 1) Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents (N 40, no exact data on ages available but all 50+)

Characteristic	Percentage (N)
Female (% , N)	67.5% (27)
Male (% , N)	32.5% (13)
Educational level	
No diploma or primary school	0% (0)
MAVO/VMBO, MBO1	5% (2)
HAVO, VWO, MBO2-4	20% (8)
Bachelor (HBO/WO)	42.5% (17)
Master (HBO)/WO)	27.5% (11)
Doctor, PhD	5% (2)
Occupational status	
Employed	27.5% (11)
Own company	17.5% (7)
Looking for work	12.5% (5)
Retired	15% (6)
Other	27.5% (11)

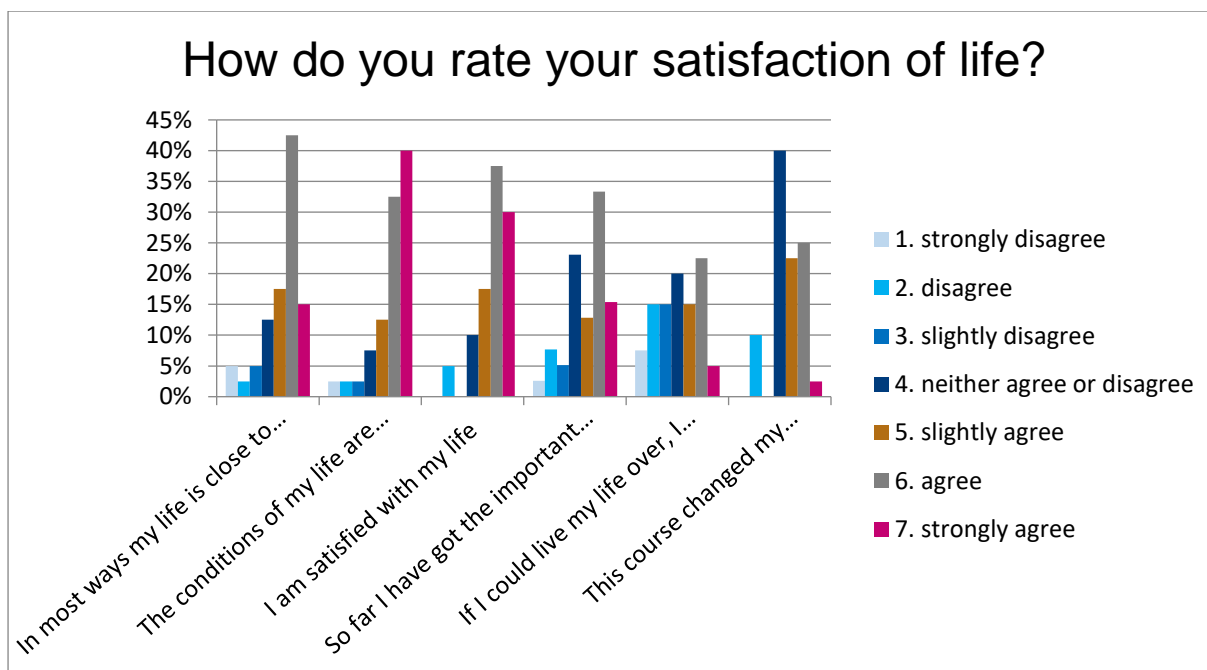


Figure 1) Results of the Satisfaction With Life Scale, completed by 40 Silver Starters

Silver Starters are satisfied with life

A breakdown of total scores, means, ranges and frequencies per item can be seen in Annex C). Figure 1) illustrates the outcome of the Satisfaction With Life Scale for all items. As can be seen, the majority of people were positive about their satisfaction level on the different dimensions. 75% of the subjects rated their life to be close to their ideal, 85% rated the conditions of their life as excellent and the same proportion stated that they are satisfied with their life. On the other hand, only 62% felt they had achieved the most important things they wanted in life and 43% would change almost nothing if they could live their life over.

The total score attributed to this scale was obtained by adding the responses to the 5 questions for each of the 7 possible answers. This means that an individual can score between 5 and 35 points. The lower the score, the less satisfied a person is and vice versa. In the sample used for this research, the average score was 25.7, indicating satisfaction. Diener²⁶ describes this score level as follows:

'Individuals like their lives and feel that things are going well. Of course their lives are not perfect, but they feel that things are mostly good. Furthermore, just because the person is satisfied does not mean she or he is complacent. In fact, growth and challenge might be part of the reason the respondent is satisfied. For most people in this high-scoring range, life is enjoyable, and the major domains of life are going well – work or school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development. The person may draw motivation from the areas of dissatisfaction'.

When asked whether the Silver Starters course had changed their wellbeing, 50% of the respondents affirmed positively. The outcome of this question is illustrated in figure 2). 40% of the subjects researched did not think that Silver Starters had impacted their wellbeing directly although they may have recognized a stabilizing influence on the existing level of wellbeing. Only 10% stated that Silver Starters had definitely not changed their wellbeing.

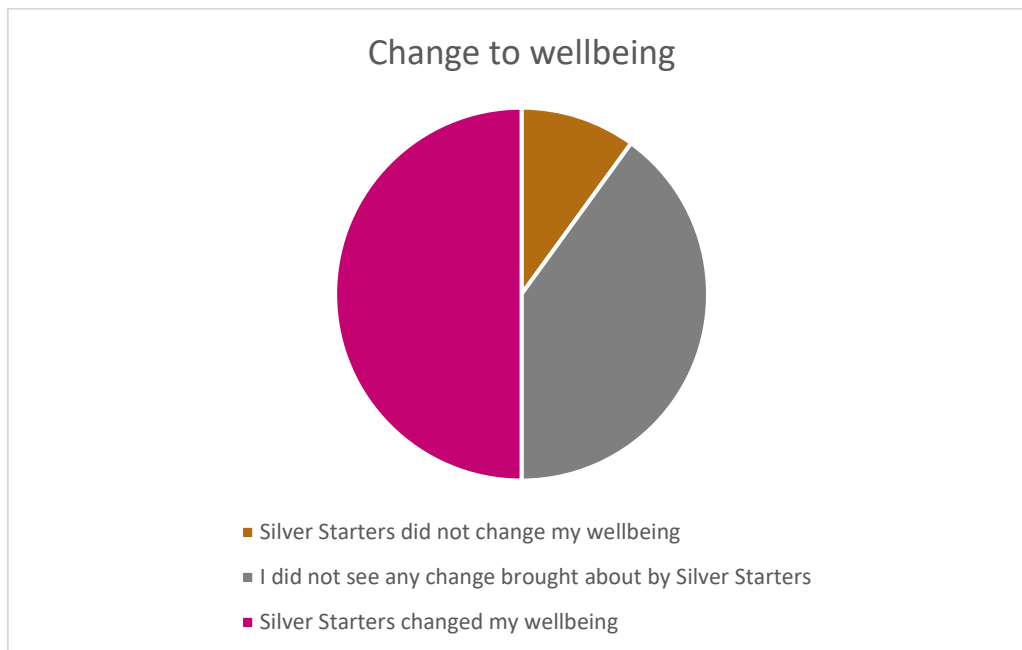


Figure 2) The effect of Silver Starter on wellbeing

The quantitative data indicates that the sample population researched had high levels of wellbeing, at least half of which appeared to have been affected by the Silver Starters course. It was therefore useful to follow up with qualitative interviews that were able to shed more light on what meaning participants attributed to Silver Starters, how they defined wellbeing and what coping mechanisms they usually employed to reach their spiritual balance. This is described next, in part 2 of the results.

2) Qualitative findings

In total, 16 individuals who had completed the Survey Monkey questionnaire had volunteered to be interviewed.

In order to obtain a range of interviewees, the inclusion criteria included gender and motivation to participate.

As described above, 12.5% of the respondents had indicated that they were unemployed, for whom Silver Starters could be seen a 'necessity' choice. Because Stephan²⁷ suggests that 'necessity' entrepreneurs may differ from 'opportunity' entrepreneurs with regard to their mental health it seemed pertinent to obtain an interview

sample of both opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs. However, only 3 of the volunteers classified as ‘necessity’ entrepreneurs. The startup ideas individuals had partially focused on a desire to create financial profit but, interestingly, the added value that some of the Silver Starters wanted to create was motivated by concepts they would go on to describe as being relevant to their own personal wellbeing, such as ‘positive relationships’ or ‘enabling environmental mastery’. Table 2) gives an overview of the socio-demographic details of the 10 selected individuals who were interviewed.

Table 2) Socio-demographic details of the study population and motivation to join programme

Participant	Gender	Motivation: necessity vs opportunity	Age
1	F	opportunity	57
2	F	opportunity	68
3	F	opportunity	53
4	F	opportunity	60
5	F	opportunity	52
6	M	necessity	60
7	M	necessity	64
8	M	opportunity	66
9	M	necessity	57
10	M	opportunity	74

Based on the initial analyses of the qualitative data, the results of the qualitative data were grouped and will be described from 3 different perspectives, namely:

- 1) **‘Why’** participants choose to join Silver Starters: This concerns the motivation that drove individuals to sign up to Silver Starters in the first place. A summary of the codes used and themes that emerged can be seen in Annex D), figure 9).
- 2) **‘How’** a person achieves wellbeing: This is considered the process an individual describes themselves as normally following that allows them to achieve wellbeing. Figure 10) in Annex D) illustrates the codes used and emergent themes found.
- 3) **‘What’** Silver Starters actually means to wellbeing, what is it they strive towards? Figures 11) and 12) in Annex D) represent the codes used and themes that evolved for what wellbeing actually meant to the people interviewed.

The concept of starting with ‘why’, then ‘how’ before discussing the ‘what’ is popular in marketing strategy²⁸ because it explains what motivates people, how they achieve something and what it actually is that they want

to achieve. Seeing that this analysis is about individuals who chose a course in entrepreneurship it seemed appropriate to use the above concepts in these circumstances, eudaimonic wellbeing being influenced by an individual's life situation, personal interpretation and desires. The three perspectives are interrelated, feed on each other and might be situated in the subconscious for some people.

Why participants decided to join Silver Starters

Logically, one would expect that the motivation to join an entrepreneurial programme would be to learn entrepreneurial skills in order to pursue setting up a new venture, validate a business idea or investigate whether entrepreneurship was an occupational path someone was interesting in following. Indeed, this was the case, as the quote below aptly illustrates¹:

'Well, it's the Silver Starters dream that I actually had. And I've had this for a long time, since 2012.' (woman, 57, following her entrepreneurial ambition whilst still in regular employment) - quote 1

She goes on to say: *'I somehow felt that I was ready for it. I actually really needed it. I mean, well, there I was struggling by myself, sure, I tried a bit of this and that...'* – quote 2

For this woman, Silver Starters was the means to turn a deep-rooted desire into reality. She described how her wellbeing depended on the skills she was going to learn and progress she was going to make. This desire to grow and personally develop was a regular theme encountered in the interviews. Even someone with a lot of entrepreneurial experience detailed how his personal growth in life was what he expected to gain. In his description he valued learning more:

'You know, you can always start again but there's always something that can go wrong. I thought, I need a better foundation, how it is done, because at school you only learn useless things, formulas and French and things you'll never need. You don't learn about life. Entrepreneurship is, that is a lot closer to life than all the knowledge you have to learn.' (man, 57, former entrepreneur looking for new opportunities) – quote 3

Interestingly, the concept of entrepreneurship was really close to this man's identity so whilst Silver Starters was seen as a learning tool, entrepreneurship in itself appeared to touch the core of this man's wellbeing. The motivation behind joining Silver Starters for this man can be seen as a search for environmental mastery.

¹All quotes have been translated from Dutch by the author

Another woman saw Silver Starters as an opportunity to transition out of being ill back into a professional routine:

'I had a gap year because I was ill. And then I thought, hey, this is handy because I work with a colleague who also uses business model canvas, value propositions and those types of concepts. So I thought, this is a nice start to my [work], I was still ill, but I could do this from home...' (woman, 52, reintegrating after illness) – quote 4

It would be fair to conclude that Silver Starters was a tool to help this woman transition back into a work routine after having been ill.

In quote 5, on the other hand, Silver Starters was a coping mechanism employed to prevent transition from a state of relatively high wellbeing into one of lower wellbeing and loneliness:

'Only, well, partly due to the corona crisis, I found my life becoming empty. And then, then I went to search the internet. And then I found Silver Starters. That's actually why I chose to participate. Not because I had an ambition to start something...' (man, 75, retired) – quote 5

Interestingly, both the man and the women behind quotes 4 and 5 went on to describe the positive impact that Silver Starters subsequently had on their wellbeing. For instance:

'Silver Starters was a moment in time, that I always emphasize, when I thought, hey, I had been ill, then along came Silver Starters after which I 'became' again so it was, for me, a sort of marking'. (woman, 52, reintegrating after illness) – quote 6

So whilst this woman had obviously been dealing with health issues she had limited control over, she proactively enrolled in Silver Starters, participated and reflected on her experience. The quote beautifully demonstrates resilience, but also how Silver Starters marked that transition into a new phase of life with new potentialities.

The man behind quote 5 had indicated that Silver Starters had not had any impact on his wellbeing. Yet his descriptions of the course seemed close to describing personal growth or flourishing:

'But apart from that, I learnt from doing the course and I found it meaningful. Because yes, I enjoy learning things so, I did gain quite a bit from doing it.' (man, 75, retired) – quote 7

Considering that this man had identified the threat of loneliness during the covid pandemic, he demonstrated self-efficacy by taking action to counter the threat of negative impact on his mental state. In doing so, he gained purpose in life.

The idea of Silver Starters being a coping mechanism was also apparent in another participant, namely in the case of a man who could be described as a 'necessity' entrepreneur, an unemployed person looking for new opportunities:

'I've been since, let me think, since October, unemployed... be that as it may, I then came home and did nothing for a few months, I said goodbye to all my working years, as it were. And then I started thinking about what I wanted to do now and starting my own company was one of the options.' (man, 60, unemployed) – quote 8

Whilst coping with life's challenges may have motivated this man to turn to Silver Starters, he had, in fact, reframed the necessity to find work as an opportunity, taking ownership of his future:

'Yes, I think that everything in life has a reason. Well, the reason that I lost my job may have been that I should now set up my life differently' (man, 60, unemployed) – quote 9

As has been demonstrated, the motivation for joining Silver Starters went beyond the search for entrepreneurial advancement for some people. Two themes repeatedly emerging were the theme of coping, as in gaining control of a situation, and the theme of proactively striving for self-fulfillment and purpose in life. The pinnacle to both themes was hope, the hope to achieve a change from a perceived lower wellbeing to a state of higher wellbeing.

How Silver Starters achieve self-efficacy

Apart from the perceived reward for deciding to participate in Silver Starters, some of the interviewees mentioned adaptive coping strategies that they habitually employed to improve their wellbeing. For instance,

'Yes, my wellbeing is always good, actually. I always have a lot of energy and I always cope well with disappointments. I'm flexible, as it were, and I generally recognize the positive aspects of life so I'm never depressed or had a burnout.' (male, 57, unemployed) – quote 10

In this example, the man appears to employ mental agility to put things into perspective. It also demonstrates self-efficacy and could be an indication of how this individual achieves eudaimonic wellbeing.

A good example of a coping strategy leading to resilience was mentioned by a woman who described how she gained confidence through negativity:

'I think that I have had my fair share of setbacks in life and that also gives you self-confidence. I think that I look for the positives in the negatives in order to be able to move forward again. I think this is also a learning process...'

(woman, 57, employed) – quote 11

In fact, this could be seen as a developmental coping strategy, just like the one described in quote 12 which was made with reference to what the individual gained from participating in Silver Starters:

'So that you also widen your network and, well, also change your idea, that's where I had gone wrong. Because you think that everyone thinks the same way as you. That's what I learnt a lot [during Silver Starters].' (woman,

68, writer) – quote 12

Quote 12 also demonstrates a reason why Silver Starters could be seen as a tool to increase self-efficacy for people who employ proactive coping strategies.

'Avoidance coping mechanisms' were also described by interviewees, although not nearly as often as developmental and adaptive strategies, for instance:

'After a while you notice that you encounter more people who see it the same way as you do. And then you make a natural distinction between those people who see it your way and those who don't. And then you navigate towards the people who see it your way.' (woman, 53, employed) – quote 13

In this example, avoidance of people is mentioned but it is, effectively yet subtly, linked to the proactive singling out of people with a similar mindset.

The woman in the next quote, on the other hand, does apply a true avoidance strategy, although as a last resort:

'This is what I've always done, always when something is negative, I see the positive aspects and use these. Or I ignore things, for instance. Yes, ignore things then. Yes, I try to ignore it.' (woman, 68, writer) – quote 14

All in all, the Silver Starters interviewed demonstrated a range of proactive behaviours to effect positive changes in their subjective wellbeing. Recognizing the potential impact of a situation on personal wellbeing may have been the result of years of life experience but it also demonstrates a capacity to facilitate change by taking ownership. This could explain why the sample participating in the survey rated relatively high on the SWLS.

The concluding part of this analysis relates what individuals actually mean when they think of wellbeing and evaluates whether a course of Silver Starters can be recommended as a useful tool in achieving eudaimonic wellbeing.

What Silver Starters means to wellbeing

'Now look, what is actually happening is that, now that I am focusing on myself, after having put everyone else's needs first over the last 40 years, I have always helped other people. And now I am noticing that these people are really enthusiastic in offering ME their help. Yes, I think that's just so lovely, just like that, that really affects me. Yes, [in tears], it's just so loving'. (woman, 57, employed) – quote 15

The above is a powerful statement of the value this woman associates with positive relationships. It clearly had a significant impact on her wellbeing that others cared for her, actually saw and valued her. In her words she describes how the attention affects her perception of self-worth which touches the core of someone's existence and gives hope.

Relationships are reciprocal and receiving something often invites giving something in return. It was therefore interesting to note that several of the business ideas pursued focused on improving the possibility to gain positive relationships. In a way, these new venture ideas of enabling positive relationships appear to reinforce the importance attributed to these by people.

Indeed, developing positive relationships was also mentioned in association with the Silver Starters course, which would indicate that the programme contributed to wellbeing:

'There were 5 of us in the group and it was simply really nice to see. Where are you? What are you doing? I found it really valuable to undergo the process with other people. I liked seeing people grow in their projects.' (woman, 53, employed) – quote 16

The personal growth experienced or associated with the course was also described to affect wellbeing in a positive way:

'Then I also think it's really important that, well, yes that I develop, I like that. I don't want to not develop, I want to grow, I want to move beyond, I want to see new things, touch new things. Yes, that's what makes me happy, that's important.' (woman, 52, student) – quote 17

In fact, personal growth was mentioned from different perspectives by all people interviewed. The person in quote 18 actually saw personal growth as the purpose of life:

'I'm somewhat convinced that we exist to learn... everything we do has value.' (man 57, seeking new opportunities) – quote 18

Self-acceptance was another concept frequently mentioned in relation to wellbeing. Having a positive attitude towards oneself, acknowledging strengths but also one's weaknesses. An appropriate summary of this way of thinking is demonstrated by the following quote:

'You know, happiness really stands above everything for me. And I know of many situations in my network where, well, where you won't be happy with the results of [bad] lifestyle habits. But, well, maybe you can also enjoy the memories of the times when you enjoyed yourself. Yes, that's what I think is important.' (man, 66, retired) – quote 19

This self-acceptance is related to the ability of putting things in perspective, one of the coping strategies mentioned above, thereby accepting that not everything is within one's own control. The interviewees, confirming more general insights on this, describe autonomy as contributing to wellbeing, as quote 20 nicely summarizes, together with having a purpose in life:

'Purposeful work and, at some point work that leaves you with the feeling that, yes, it adds some of the essentials, that is actually really important to me, for wellbeing. So both autonomy and also using your time in a way that adds worthwhile purpose. And as you get older, I think, unconsciously maybe, at least for me, this becomes more and more important.' (man, 64, recently made redundant) – quote 20

A sense of freedom was seen as a goal in life, a display of environmental mastery when achieved. This may well have been an important factor for individuals deciding to take steps in entrepreneurship or, in the very least, learn about starting a new venture.

'And some people are reluctant to take the risk, reluctant to take the hurdle but once they have, they also can reach a higher level of happiness. We all live in fear here, I find, in our society. It would be great for so many people if society became a bit more free. That's when you really meet yourself...' (man, 57, searching for new economic opportunities) – quote 21

Interestingly, the man in quote 22 considered entrepreneurship as means to achieve higher wellbeing, another indication that Silver Starters could be considered a tool allowing people to improve their wellbeing:

'I get the highest feeling of happiness from being a father, that is what I consider the best. And freedom, health, entrepreneurship. I actually think that entrepreneurship is very close to freedom, personal development and achieving things together, building things, as it were, that's what makes me really happy.' (man, 57, searching for opportunities) – quote 22

Discussion

This study set out to investigate whether Silver Starters had an impact on participant's wellbeing in terms of eudaimonic outcomes (1), how participants evaluated this wellbeing (2) and whether participants felt that Silver Starters had provided them with a tool to achieve eudaimonic outcomes in the future (3). The combined outcome of these research questions covers novel ground not found in the literature.

In order to investigate impact, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The study population reported high levels of wellbeing, as measured by the SWLS and 50% indicated that the Silver Starters course had contributed to their wellbeing.

When investigating why participants had joined Silver Starters in the first place, it became evident that the motivation went further than entrepreneurial advancement for some people. Whilst Silver Starters provided some people with an opportunity to cope, as in gaining control of a situation, other individuals wanted to proactively strive for personal growth, self-fulfillment and purpose in life. The latter three themes tie in with the stipulation that participants felt enabled to flourish through Silver Starters. For all participants, the overarching driver was hope, the hope that would allow individuals to move from a perceived lower level of wellbeing to a higher level.

With regard to what Silver Starters actually meant when they contemplated their own wellbeing, several concepts stood out in the qualitative part of this research. These include autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life self-acceptance and positive relationships with others. They also coincide with Ryff's²⁹ model of eudaimonic wellbeing which is based on the analysis of prominent thinkers dating back to Aristotle. This finding is of note because of the ongoing discussion as to the measurement potential of Diener's SWLS with regard to eudaimonic wellbeing. It indicates that the SWLS probably can be regarded as a fair assessment tool of eudaimonic wellbeing. This conclusion was drawn because the study population was positively assessed by both the qualitative and quantitative measures although more research would be advisable in order to assert this with certainty.

Another interesting observation was the fact that some of the Silver Starters interviewed placed such a high value on positive relationships that they felt motivated to set up an enterprise on this that would enable others to improve on their wellbeing. This ties in with how some participants described their own pathway to wellbeing.

The population sampled repeatedly mentioned developmental coping strategies, involving learning and (social) support seeking as well as adaptive strategies involving reflection or adjusting expectations. Some avoidance strategies were also mentioned. This correlates with Fontes and Neri's³⁰ findings that older people commonly use developmental, adaptive or avoidance coping strategies.

According to Bandura's³¹ social cognitive theory, learning based on own identification is necessary to develop self-efficacy. This may also be the reason why older individuals demonstrate the resiliency that is necessary for the 'wellbeing paradox'³² mentioned earlier. Personal growth is also known to deeply affect wellbeing from the perspective of Ryan and Deci's³³ self-determination theory which combines intrinsic motivation to achieve growth with the autonomy to pursue it, competence to achieve it and a feedback system involving peers. In fact, this feedback system falls under 'positive relationships', which are highlighted by Ryff³⁴ as a key aspect of eudaimonic wellbeing.

So whilst it is a fair conclusion to state that the entrepreneurial Silver Starters course had the potential to impact participants' eudaimonic wellbeing, which happened to be quite high in this population sample, the extent of which this was influenced by participation is difficult to ascertain. In order to measure the exact impact on eudaimonic wellbeing it would be necessary to recognize all aspects that have potential influence over one's own wellbeing and this requires personalized benchmarks that are difficult to obtain and compare.

50% of participants clearly indicated that Silver Starters had impacted their wellbeing but another 40% did not notice changes to their wellbeing. This could be a reflection of the motivation to join Silver Starters in the first place. Was it to investigate a business idea, personally develop, find purpose in life, was it a coping strategy or a combination of the aforementioned reasons? It would be useful to anticipate and research this in future editions of Silver Starters in order to cater better to the wishes and desires of the participants, also in view of the fact that two thirds of the study population was female and, according to Martinez³⁵, men and women demonstrate differences in their coping strategies. As it is, this skewedness of participating sexes could be seen as a study limitation, as was the total number of participants. Out of 95 individuals invited to complete the Survey Monkey questionnaire, only 40 chose to do so and only 10 were subsequently interviewed.

In order to ascertain whether Silver Starters could be further developed into a tool to achieve eudaimonic outcomes, a larger study sample would be beneficial, including a wider educational/ socio-economic background

of participants and a larger sample of 'necessity' entrepreneurs. It would also be helpful if the course was not taking place in the midst of a world-wide pandemic that is known to influence wellbeing.

What can be said with certainty, however, is that Silver Starters was considered a meaningful activity on multiple levels. For budding entrepreneurs, Silver Starters provided tools to develop ideas, networks and stimulate personal growth, the latter being a key ingredient towards enabling flourishing. Bandera³⁶ mentions verbal persuasion by the social environment and self-comparison with peers as being useful when trying to achieve self-efficacy. Silver Starters could be seen as providing a platform for these, in particular the fact that the course had integrated (peer) coaching components. For individuals who saw Silver Starters as a means to cope it can also be argued that the course had potential to increase self-efficacy but the extent of this requires further investigation. All in all, it is hoped that future research into the impact of an entrepreneurial course on eudaimonic wellbeing in older people will shed even more light into this highly fascinating area that could eventually evolve into a preventative measure to improving population health.

Annex A) Satisfaction of Life Scale

Please note that the Dutch version of the scale was used.

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

- ____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
____ I am satisfied with my life.
____ So far I have got the important things I want in life.
____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Scoring: The scores are obtained by adding the responses of the 5 questions by the 7 possible answers. Though scoring should be kept continuous (sum up scores on each item), here are some cutoffs to be used as benchmarks.

- ♣ 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- ♣ 26 - 30 Satisfied
- ♣ 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- ♣ 20 Neutral
- ♣ 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- ♣ 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- ♣ 5 - 9 Extremely dissatisfied

Annex B) Interview questions

- 1) Kun je jezelf even kort voorstellen? Iets vertellen over jezelf?
- 2) Hoe vond je Silver Starters?
 - a. Hoe ben je er toegekomen om eraan mee te doen?
 - o Welke motivaties?
 - o Welke verwachtingen?
 - o Hoe vond je het om er aan te beginnen?
- 3) Wat is je ervan bijgebleven? Kun je beschrijven wat Silver starters voor je gedaan heeft (of niet) – tijdens de cursus zelf? Of naar afloop van?
- 4) Hoe zou je je welbevinden nu beschrijven?
 - a. Wat heeft volgens jou invloed op je welbevinden?
 - o Waar wordt je blij van?
 - o Welke dingen vind je belangrijk in het leven?
 - o Wat geeft waarde aan jouw leven?
 - b. Hoe zorg je er normaal gesproken voor dat je weer blij wordt als iets een keer tegenvalt? Hoe ga je normaal gesproken om met tegenslag?
 - i. Is dit de laatste tijd veranderd?
 - ii. Hoe zit dit met dingen die buiten je controle zijn? Is daar de laatste tijd iets in veranderd?
- 5) Wat voor impact heeft Silver Starters gehad op je dagelijks welbevinden – tijdens de cursus/nu?
 - a. Wat voor verschil heeft Silver starters gemaakt?
 - b. Wat zijn de belangrijkste dingen die je geleerd hebt/te weten bent gekomen tijdens Silver starters?
 - c. Welke dingen vond je waardevol aan Silver starters? Welke minder waardevol?
 - d. Behalve hoe je een idee uitwerkt en een business model canvas opsteld etc, zijn er andere dingen die je over jezelf geleerd hebt? Wat?
 - e. Hoe zou je uitdagingen nu (anders) aanpakken?
- 6) Wat is volgens jou een goede leeftijd om een cursus over ondernemerschap te volgen? Hoezo?
 - a. Voor wie is Silver Starters een goed idee?
- 7) Hoe zou je jezelf nu omschrijven?
 - a. Is dit veranderd sinds Silver starters?
 - b. Hoe sta je in het leven?
- 8) Hoe gaat het nu met je idee en wat ga je ermee doen?
 - a. Hoe vind je het om aan jouw bedrijf/idee te werken? Wat geeft dit jou?
 - b. Hoe is het ontwikkelen van jouw idee van impact op je welbevinden?
 - c. Wat is je droom-uitkomst over een jaar?
 - d. Wat doet het met je als je nu zo over je droom-uitkomst aan het denken bent?
- 9) Wil je nog iets anders vertellen/toevoegen?

Annex C) Quantitative raw data

Table 3) Descriptive statistics of the SWLS

Item	Mean	Median	Range
In most ways my life is close to my ideal	5.2	6	1-6
The conditions of my life are excellent	5.8	6	1-7
I am satisfied with my life	5.7	6	2-7
So far I have got the most important things I want in life	5.0	5	1-7
If I could live my life again, I would change almost nothing	4.1	4	1-7
This course changed my wellbeing	4.6	5	2-7

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = neither agree or disagree

5 = slightly agree

6 = agree

7 = strongly agree

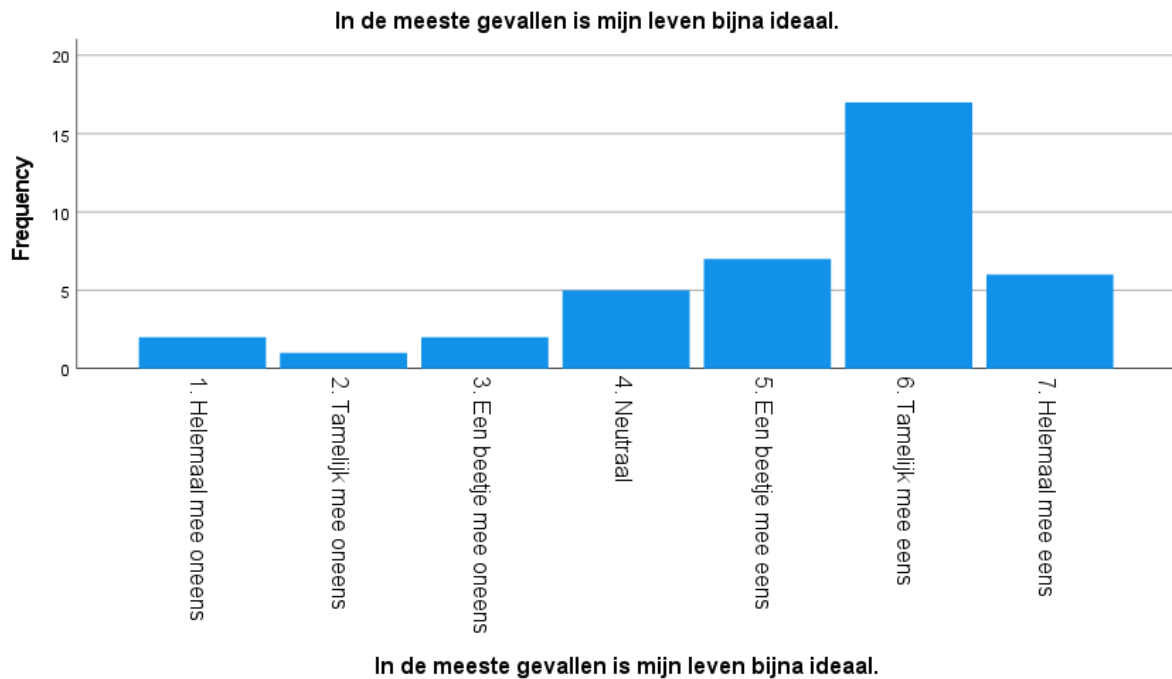


Figure 3) Frequency of answers to item 'in most ways my life is close to ideal'

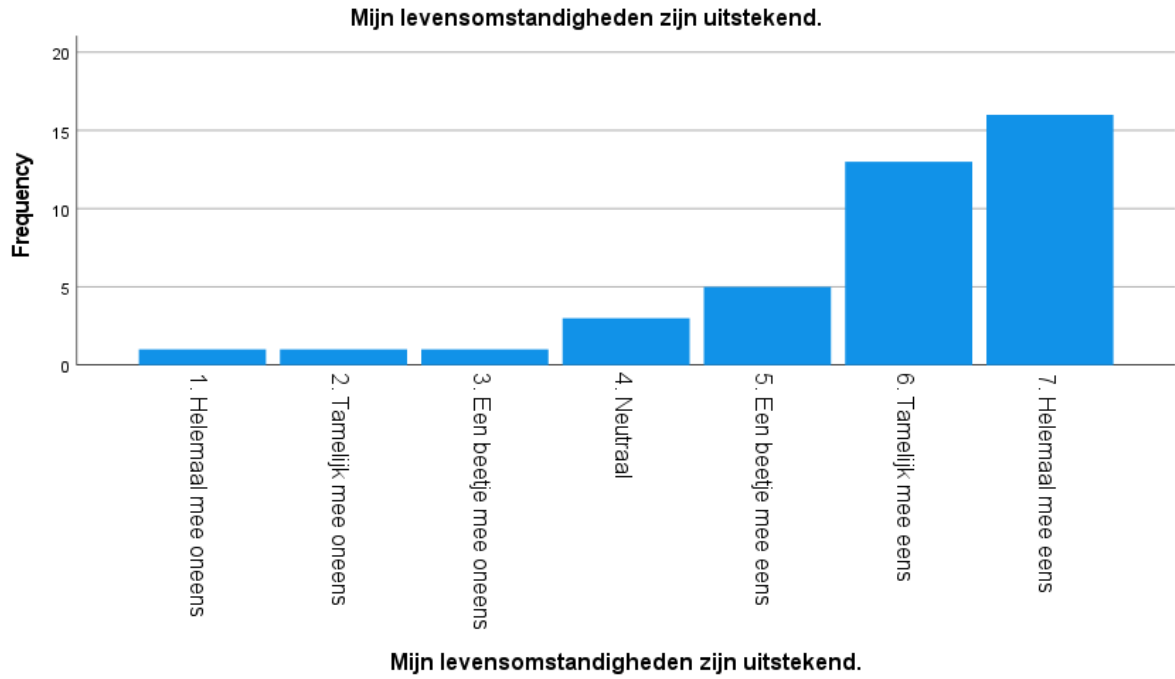


Figure 4) Frequency of answers to item 'the conditions of my life are excellent'

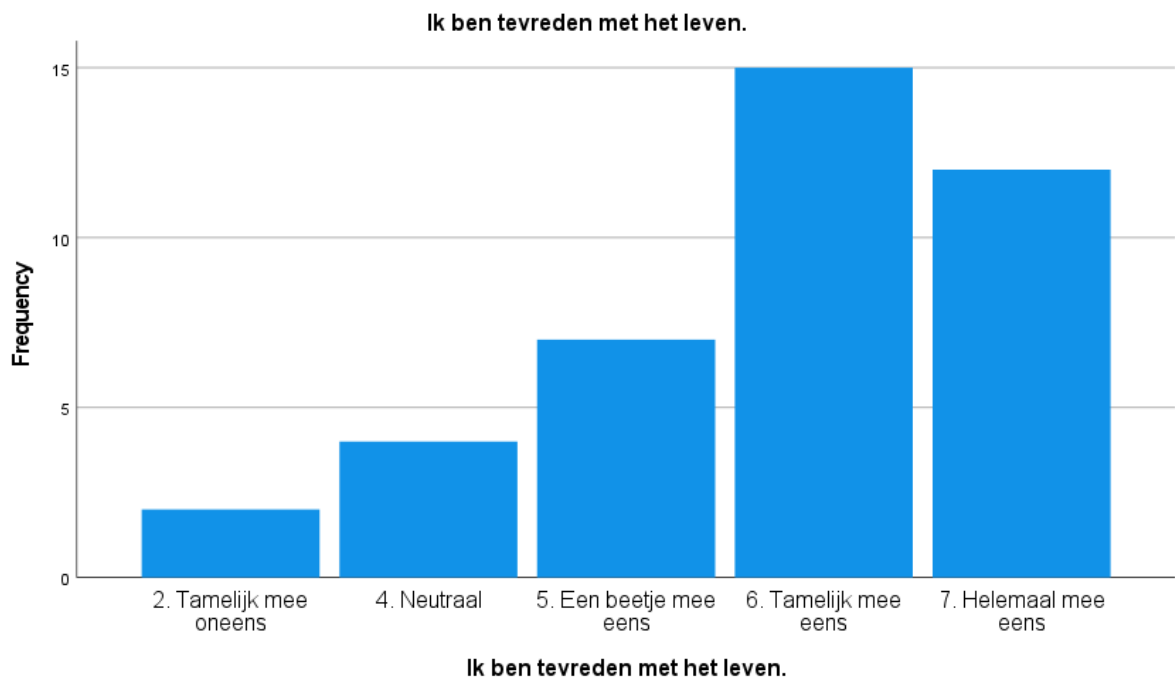


Figure 5) Frequency of answers to item 'I am satisfied with my life'

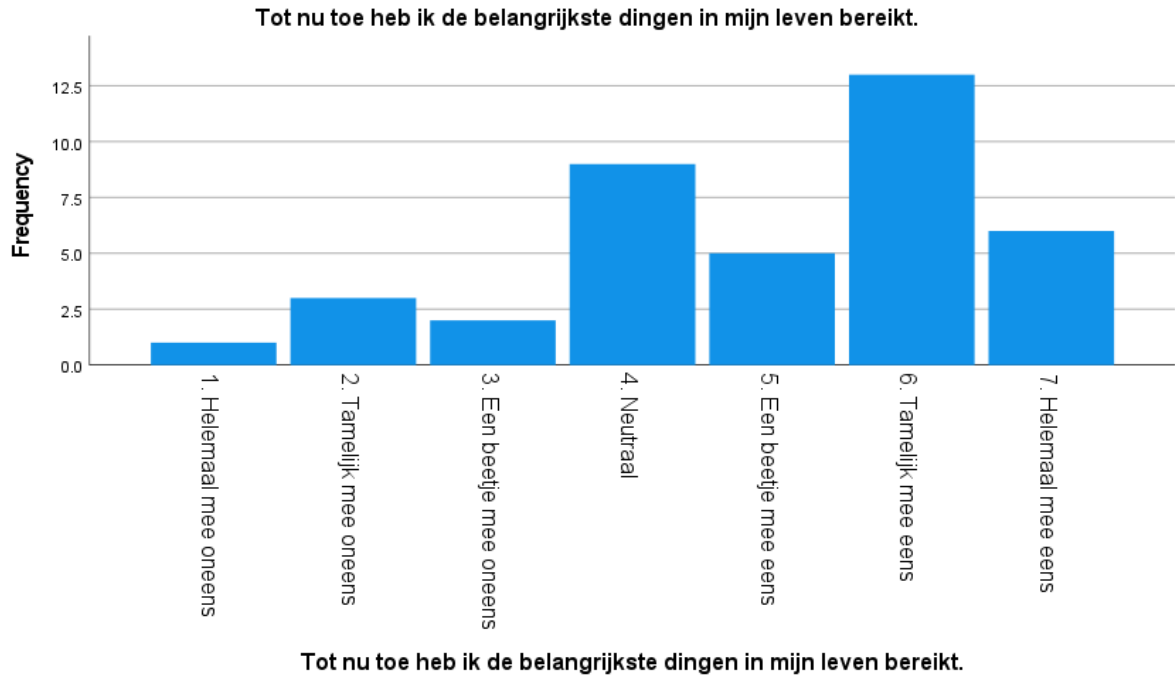


Figure 6) Frequency of answers to item 'so far I have got the most important things I want in life'

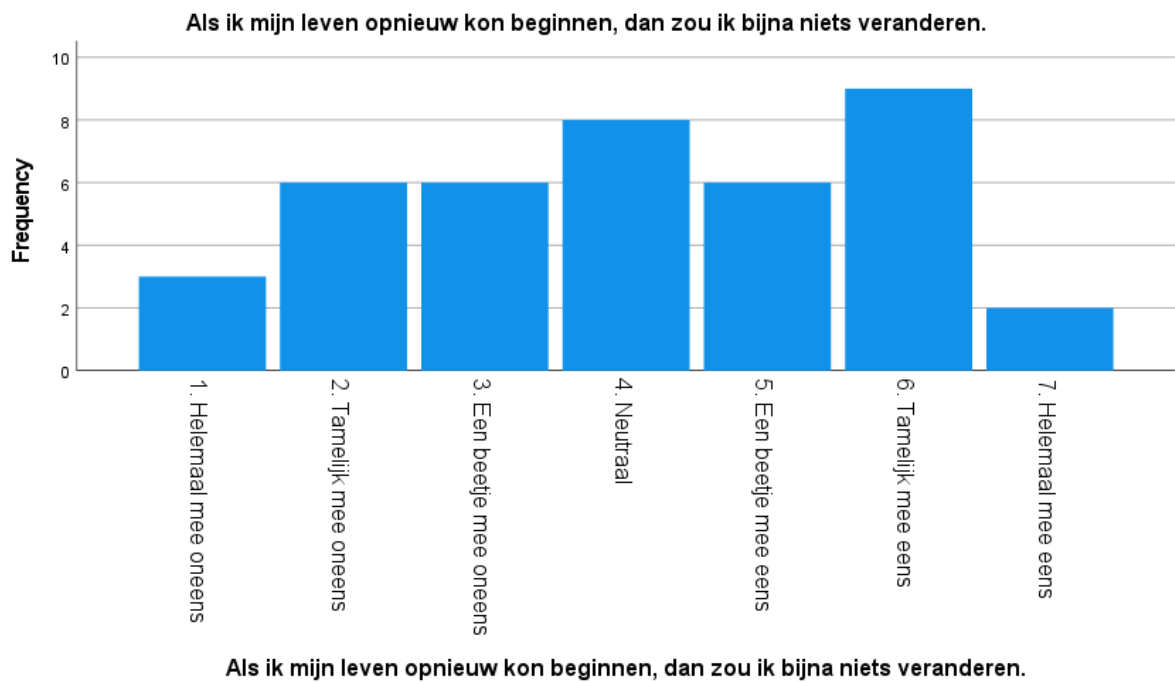


Figure 7) Frequency of answers to item 'if I could live my life again, I would change almost nothing'

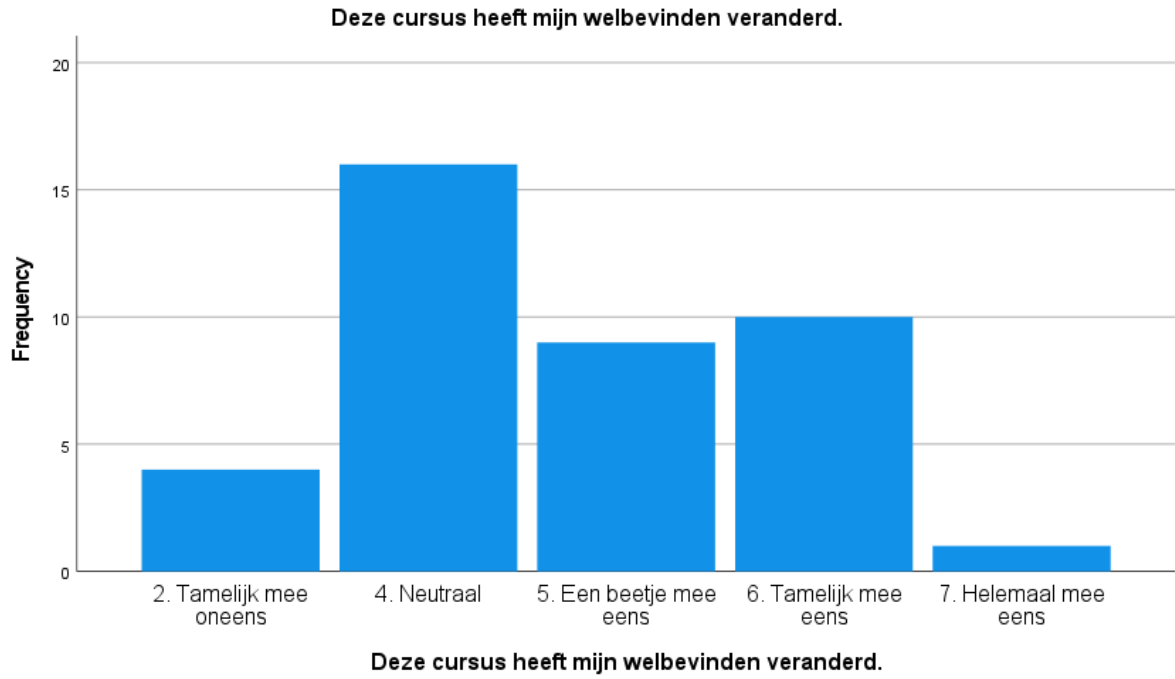


Figure 8) Frequency of answers to item 'this course has changed my wellbeing'

Annex D) Qualitative codes and themes

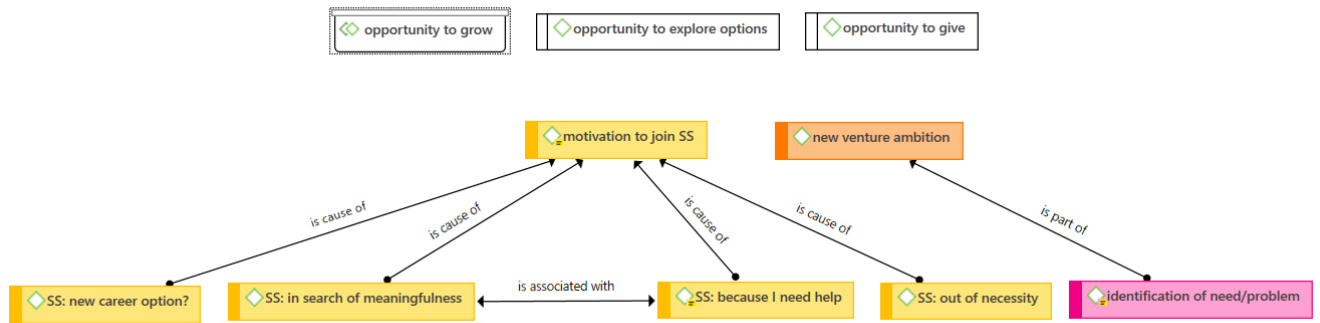


Figure 9) Codes used and themes that emerged with regard to motivation

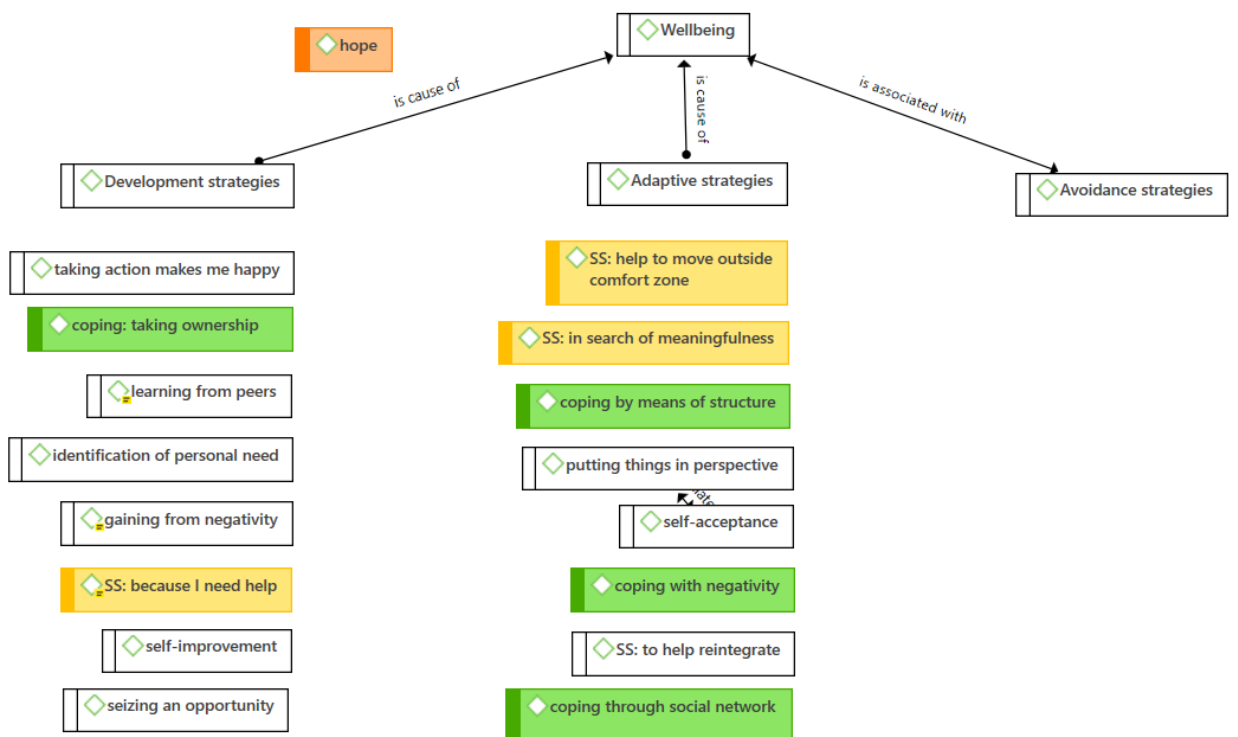


Figure 10) Codes used and themes that emerged with regard to coping

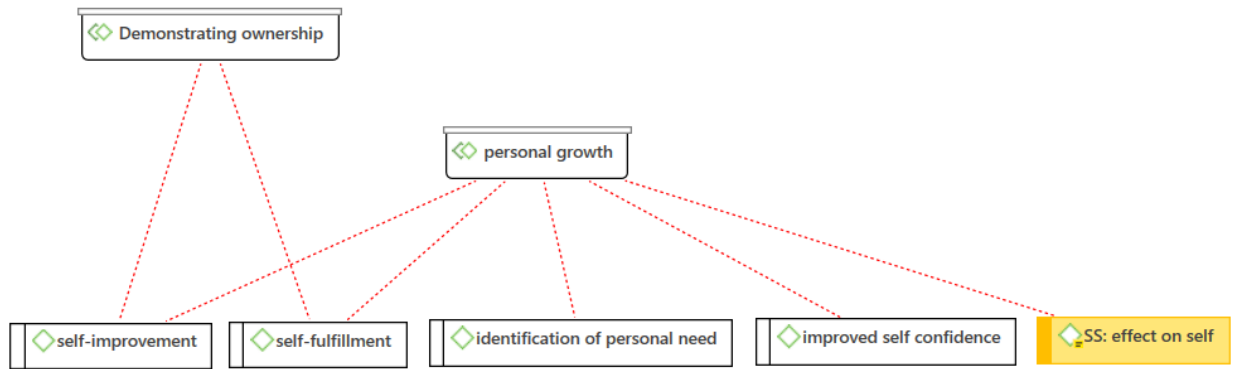


Figure 11) Codes used and frameworks related to personal growth

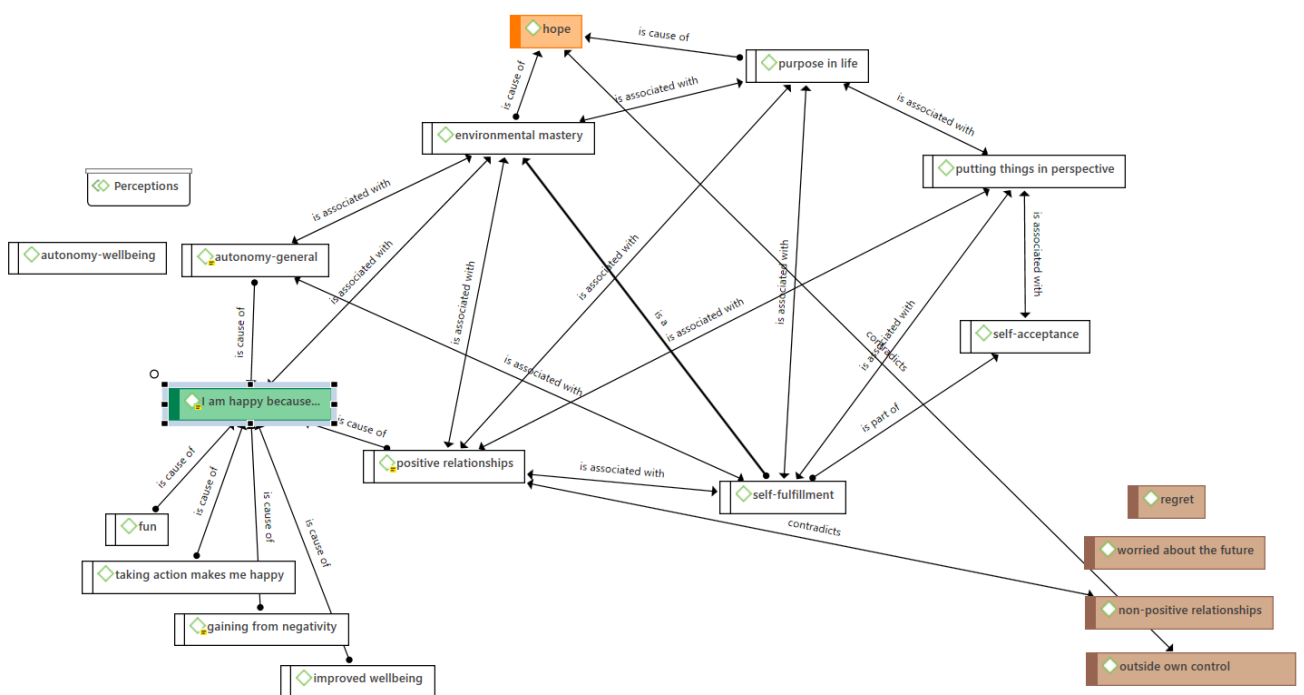


Figure 12) Codes used and frameworks related to wellbeing in general

Annex E) Ryff's³⁷ model of eudaimonic wellbeing

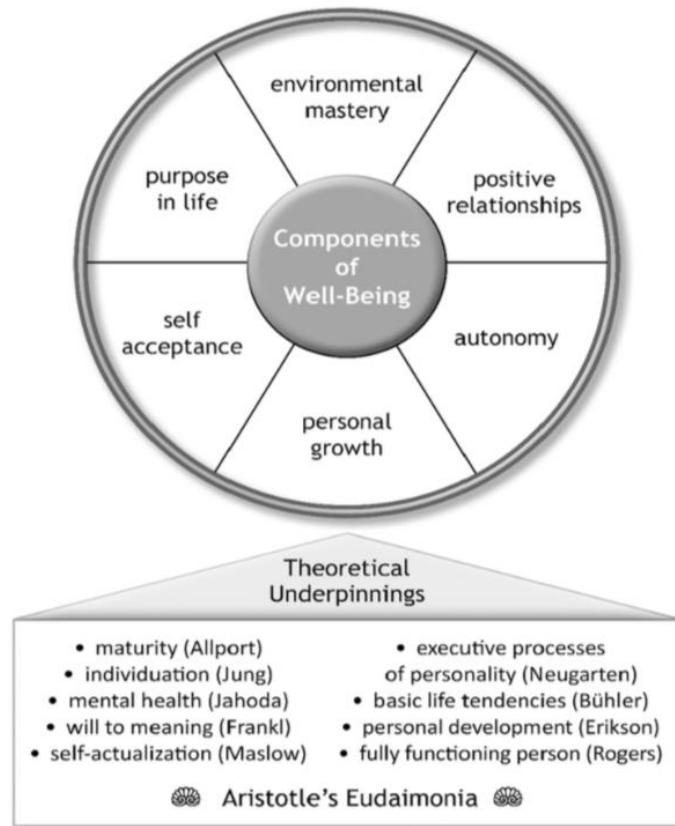


Figure 13) Ryff's model of eudaimonic wellbeing

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