

Article

Engagement or Enjoyment? Attitudes of Older Adults in Group Lunch vs. Lifelong Learning Programs

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores aging attitudes among older adults participating in two distinct community programs: neighborhood lunch (NLP) and lifelong learning (LLP) programs.

Methods: Participants were recruited from NLP and LLP programs within the same county in Florida, and an aging attitudes scale originally developed by German researchers was administered.

Results: A total of 193 participants, with a mean age of 73.2 (SD = 7.78), completed the survey, with 43% from NLP. LLP participants scored significantly higher on statements associated with engagement, such as “would like to have responsibilities”, “have a task”, “do unpaid volunteer work”, and “help others” ($p < 0.001$). Conversely, NLP participants rated higher on statements reflecting enjoyment-oriented attitudes, such as “no longer have to contribute to society”, “want to enjoy life”, and “finally want to rest and relax” (all $p < 0.001$). Exploratory factor analysis using principal component extraction and varimax rotation revealed a robust two-factor structure that aligned with theoretical expectations of engagement and enjoyment orientations, explaining 60% of the variance (30% per factor). The scales demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha of 0.764 (CITC: 0.457–0.660) for the 4-item engagement scale and 0.634 (CITC: 0.379–0.499) for the 3-item enjoyment scale. These results indicate good internal consistency, with each item contributing meaningfully to the overall construct. Regression analyses on “Engagement”, controlling for age, race, marital status, and education ($F = 8.49, p < 0.001$), showed lower engagement attitudes in the NLP group ($\beta = -0.564, p < 0.001$). Similarly, analyses on “Enjoyment” ($F = 6.33, p < 0.001$) found higher enjoyment in the NLP group ($\beta = 0.331, p = 0.014$) but lower enjoyment among those over 75 ($\beta = -0.191, p = 0.02$). Discussion: These findings suggest that LLP participants are more engagement-oriented, while NLP participants favor enjoyment in their aging attitudes. The validated 7-item scale provides a practical tool for assessing aging attitudes in community-dwelling older adults, offering insights for developing tailored programs and services.

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KEYWORDS: aging attitudes; engagement; enjoyment; neighborhood lunch program (NLP); lifelong learning program (LLP)

INTRODUCTION

The Role of Aging Attitudes in Health and Longevity

Understanding aging attitudes and their potential to shape health outcomes is essential for promoting positive and healthy aging, especially as the global population aged 60 and older is projected to double to 2.1 billion [1]. Research demonstrates that individuals with more positive attitudes about aging tend to live longer, remain socially active, and experience better health than those with negative perceptions [2]. For instance, a large study of adults over 50 found that those with the highest satisfaction with aging had a 43% lower risk of dying from any cause over four years compared to those with the least satisfaction [2].

Positive aging attitudes are consistently linked to better physical and mental health outcomes, as well as longevity [3,4]. A study conducted by Bryant and colleagues [3] in Australia found that older adults with more positive attitudes toward aging reported higher life satisfaction, better physical and mental health, and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, a recent survey among residents in 10 life plan communities revealed that individuals with positive perceptions of aging experienced greater wellness and were more likely to participate in wellness programs. The study also highlighted specific dimensions of aging attitudes, such as psychological growth, psychosocial loss, and physical change, which contributed to these beneficial effects [5].

These findings underscore the importance of fostering environments that encourage the generativity and social participation of older adults. A participatory approach to aging emphasizes the active involvement of older adults in societal roles that enable them to share their wisdom and experiences with peers and younger generations. This approach aligns with Erikson's psychosocial theory of development, which highlights the role of generativity in later life—where individuals seek to leave a legacy through mentoring, teaching, and contributing to the well-being of others [6]. Such engagement not only benefits older adults but also reinforces their value as active members of society rather than passive recipients of care.

Conversely, negative attitudes toward aging can significantly harm physical and mental health, as well as overall quality of life [7]. Research shows that older adults with negative perceptions of aging are at a higher risk of developing chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease [8,9]. These attitudes are also associated with poorer mental health outcomes, including increased levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness [10].

Dimensions of Aging Attitudes: Insights from Research

Given the significance of attitudes towards aging on overall health and well-being among older adults, there is a critical need to gain a better understanding of how older adults view aging and how these attitudes towards aging might be different or similar among older adults participating in different community programs for tailored services and activities development tailored for community-dwelling older adults.

While attitudes towards aging are important for well-being and quality of life in late life, few studies have examined the specific dimensions of these attitudes. There has been little consensus on the dimensions of how older adults perceive aging. Researchers from Southern California conducted a qualitative study to explore older adults' perspectives on successful aging and their views regarding activities and interventions to enhance its likelihood [11]. Their study identified two key themes to successful aging: self-acceptance and engagement with life or self-growth. Self-acceptance involves positive attitudes or acceptance toward life. The engagement with life consisted of novel pursuits, giving to others, social interactions, and positive attitudes.

These findings align with a recent systematic review of older adults' perspectives on "successful aging" across 13 countries from 2010 to 2020 [12]. The review analyzed 23 peer-reviewed journal articles and found that older adults commonly highlight social engagement (96%) and positive attitudes (88%) as essential to successful aging, alongside independence (79%) and physical health (79%). Social engagement was defined as active involvement in life, social roles, community participation, and interactions with family and friends. Positive attitudes involved optimism, acceptance, adaptation to life, happiness, and enjoyment.

Consistently, empirical qualitative studies and review studies on successful aging highlight two key themes: engagement and positive attitudes. Engagement involves active participation in life, while positive attitudes encompass optimism, acceptance, and enjoyment. Understanding these dimensions can guide the design of community programs that foster social engagement and a positive outlook, supporting healthy aging.

Impact of Engagement and Enjoyment on Aging Outcomes

Engagement refers to an active, positive outlook toward aging, characterized by continued participation in social, physical, and cognitive activities and a desire to contribute to society [13]. Several studies have found that individuals with high levels of engagement tend to experience better physical and cognitive functioning, lower rates of depression, and a higher overall quality of life compared to those with lower levels of engagement [11,12,14]. However, some researchers have challenged Rowe and Kahn's concept of successful aging, emphasizing the importance of taking a life course perspective considering how various factors and

experiences across a person's entire lifespan influence their health, well-being, and aging process [15].

Enjoyment in aging refers to a more leisure-oriented outlook characterized by a desire for relaxation and participation in leisure activities. Recent research suggests that "too much free time may be almost as bad as too little", advocating for spending newfound retirement time with purpose [16]. Leisure activities, broadly viewed, include activities individuals engage in during their free time, such as exercise and socializing [17]. These activities are preferred and enjoyable, potentially improving quality of life [18]. Definitions of leisure vary, encompassing time free from labor, activities freeing one from obligations, and experiences that are pleasant [19].

While theories may have somewhat different perspectives or focus, evidence of the positive associations between engagement and healthy aging, as well as leisure or enjoyment and healthy aging, are evident [11,12,14,18].

Study Gap and Purpose: Assessing Aging Attitudes Across Community Programs

While aging attitudes have been explored qualitatively, there remains a critical gap in the development and application of specific measurement tools. Attitudes toward aging, characterized by themes of engagement or enjoyment, play a pivotal role in shaping well-being in later life. However, limited research exists on how older adults perceive these attitudes within distinct community program contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by comparing aging attitudes, specifically engagement and enjoyment, among participants in two community programs: neighborhood lunch programs (NLP) and lifelong learning programs (LLP).

Neighborhood lunch programs primarily provide nutritious meals and opportunities for socialization, fostering a sense of community and connection. In contrast, lifelong learning programs focus on intellectual growth and education, encouraging cognitive engagement and personal development. Both models represent promising strategies for promoting healthy aging through community participation [20–22].

By examining differences in aging attitudes among NLP and LLP participants, this research aims to capture the diverse preferences and engagement levels of older adults. Such insights are invaluable for program leaders and policymakers seeking to design and implement community initiatives that effectively address the needs and aspirations of older adults.

METHODS

Older adults from both a neighborhood lunch program (NLP) and a lifelong learning program (LLP) in the same county in Central Florida participated in this study. An aging attitudes measurement tool initially developed by German researchers [23] was used, consisting of two

subscales: (1) Active Engagement and (2) Enjoyment and Leisure. According to the authors, the development of these scales was inspired by the concept of “prescriptive norms of aging”. This concept includes two contrasting norms: one promoting active aging, which encourages older adults to stay engaged and contribute to society, and the other suggesting withdrawal from public life and focusing on personal interests [24–27]. These concepts align with existing theories and evidence in the gerontological field worldwide.

The items in the measurement tool were designed to capture two dimensions of aging attitudes. One dimension reflects the attitude of “staying active and engaged in old age”, indicating a desire to remain productive and involved. The other dimension reflects the attitude of “enjoying life in old age”, emphasizing the freedom, time, and reduced external obligations in old age to pursue enjoyable activities that may have been postponed earlier in life.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the study sample and variables. Exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) using principal component extraction methods, along with varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, were conducted to understand the structure of the scale components. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was chosen over confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the scale’s applicability in a new cultural context. While the original constructs were validated in a different population, this study involved older adults from a distinct cultural background, where values and attitudes toward aging may differ. EFA allows flexibility in identifying factor structures without predefined constraints, ensuring the scale is appropriately adapted and meaningful in this new context before applying CFA for further validation.

Cronbach’s alphas were calculated to assess the internal consistencies of the scales. T-tests were used to compare demographics and aging attitude scales between the two groups. Lastly, regression analyses were employed to confirm the relationships among aging attitudes perceived by older adults participating in the two community programs, while controlling for demographic variables.

RESULTS

Participants

A total of 193 older adults participated in the study, with 43% from the neighborhood lunch program (NLP). The mean age was 73.2 years (SD = 7.78). Data analysis revealed that participants in the neighborhood lunch program (NLP) group were, on average, older than those in the lifelong learning program (LLP) group (77 vs. 70 years; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, compared to the LLP group, NLP participants were less likely to be currently married (25% vs. 70%; $p < 0.001$), less likely to have a college education (31% vs. 92%; $p < 0.001$), less likely to be white (24% vs. 96%; $p < 0.001$), and more likely to live alone (35% vs. 25%; $p = 0.010$). In addition,

NLP participants tend to score lower on their self-rated quality of life (4.12 vs 4.49; $p = 0.001$) and overall health (3.59 vs 3.95; $p = 0.007$), comparing with LLP participants.

Factor Analyses and Reliabilities

The scree plot generated from principal component analysis revealed a clear two-component structure with eigenvalues exceeding one. Exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) employing principal component extraction methods, along with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalization, yielded a distinct and balanced 2-factor pattern, accounting for 60% of the total variance (30% each). These two factors, reflecting engagement versus enjoyment perceptions of aging, were consistent with the conceptual framework during scale development and supported by existing gerontological theories and evidence.

Following the removal of items exhibiting negative or low corrected item-total correlations (CITCs) or double loadings, the final scale comprised of seven items. The “Engagement” scale included four items: (1) I would like to have responsibilities in old age; (2) I would like to have a task in old age; (3) I am ready to do unpaid volunteer work after retirement age; and (4) In old age, I am prepared to help others to the best of my ability (Table 1). The “Enjoyment” scale comprised three items: (1) When I am old, I no longer feel obligated to contribute to society; (2) Once I retire, I simply want to enjoy life; and (3) In old age, I finally desire to rest and relax. The reliability of the two-factor scales was satisfactory, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of 0.764 (CITC range: 0.457–0.660) for the engagement scale (4-item) and 0.634 (CITC range: 0.379–0.499) for the enjoyment scale (3-item) (Table 2).

Table 1. Aging attitudes—engagement scale ($n = 178/193$).

Item Description	Mean (SD)	CITC	Alpha if deleted
(Engagement-1) I would like to have responsibilities in old age.	3.03 (0.991)	0.649	0.663
(Engagement-2) I would like to have a task in old age.	3.08 (1.019)	0.660	0.656
(Engagement-3) I am ready to do unpaid volunteer work after reaching retirement age.	3.19 (1.038)	0.512	0.741
(Engagement-4) In old age, I am ready to help others to the extent that I can.	3.52 (0.818)	0.457	0.763
Engagement Scale (4-item)	Item mean = 3.205	Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.766	

Notes: A Cronbach’s alpha of ≥ 0.70 indicates satisfactory reliability, while a Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) of ≥ 0.30 suggests that an item contributes meaningfully to the overall construct being measured.

Table 2. Aging attitudes—enjoyment scale ($n = 180/193$).

Item Description	Mean (SD)	CITC	Alpha if deleted
(Enjoyment-1) When I am old, I no longer have to contribute to society.	1.47 (0.868)	0.370	0.635
(Enjoyment-2) Once I retire, I just want to enjoy life.	3.25 (0.980)	0.476	0.494
(Enjoyment-3) In old age, I finally want to rest and to relax.	2.83 (1.011)	0.499	0.460
Enjoyment Scale (3-item)	Item mean = 2.519	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.636	

Notes: A Cronbach's alpha of ≥ 0.70 indicates satisfactory reliability, while a Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) of ≥ 0.30 suggests that an item contributes meaningfully to the overall construct being measured.

Aging Attitudes by Community Programs and Demographics

The current data revealed that older adults in the lifelong learning program (LLP) showed higher endorsement of attitudes related to “having responsibilities”, “having a task”, “engaging in unpaid volunteer work”, and “helping others” compared to those in the neighborhood lunch program (NLP) (13.96 vs. 11.29; $p < 0.001$). On the other hand, NLP participants expressed greater endorsement of attitudes indicating “no longer feeling obligated to contribute to society”, “desiring to enjoy life”, and “finally wanting to rest and relax” compared to LLP participants (10.41 vs. 9.11; $p < 0.001$).

Given the demographic disparities between the two groups, the perceptions of aging were further examined based on demographic characteristics. The findings revealed that participants aged younger than 75 were somewhat more likely to endorse “Engagement” attitudes compared to their older counterparts (13.24 vs. 12.15; $p < 0.015$). Moreover, individuals with a college education were also more likely to support higher engagement attitudes than those with a high school education or less (13.52 vs. 11.45; $p = 0.036$). Whites exhibited a greater likelihood of endorsing “Engagement” attitudes compared to non-Whites (13.37 vs. 11.79; $p < 0.001$), and married participants were somewhat more likely to endorse higher “Engagement” attitudes compared to unmarried individuals (13.34 vs. 12.47; $p = 0.022$) (Table 3).

On the other hand, the data indicated that single older adults (single, widowed, or divorced) were more likely to endorse “Enjoyment” attitudes compared to their married counterparts (10.19 vs. 9.21; $p < 0.001$), as were individuals with a high school education or less compared to those with a college education (10.11 vs. 9.45; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, minorities were more likely to endorse “Enjoyment” attitudes compared to non-minorities (10.42 vs. 9.26; $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, there were no significant

differences between males and females regarding these perceptions of aging (Table 3).

Table 3. Aging attitudes among older adults by demographic characteristics.

Scale	Demographic/Group	Scale Mean (SD)	Cohen's d	p-value
Engagement (4-item)	<75 years (n = 107)	13.24 (2.602)	0.368	0.015*
	≥75 years (n = 66)	12.15 (3.478)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	<75 years (n = 108)	9.60 (1.874)	-	0.353
	≥75 years (n = 66)	9.73 (2.472)		
Engagement (4-item)	<HS (n = 60)	11.45 (3.437)	-0.733	<0.001**
	≥College (n = 117)	13.52 (2.455)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	<HS (n = 62)	10.11 (2.555)	0.318	0.036*
	≥College (n = 116)	9.45 (1.795)		
Engagement (4-item)	Single (n = 88)	12.47 (3.129)	-0.307	0.022*
	Married (n = 87)	13.34 (2.569)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	Single (n = 89)	10.19 (2.005)	0.493	<0.001**
	Married (n = 87)	9.21 (1.989)		
Engagement (4-item)	Male (n = 41)	12.66 (2.670)	-	0.087
	Female (n = 135)	12.90 (3.021)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	Male (n = 41)	9.27 (2.429)	-	0.326
	Female (n = 136)	9.78 (1.995)		
Engagement (4-item)	Others (n = 62)	11.79 (3.315)	-0.547	<0.001**
	White (n = 115)	13.37 (2.641)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	Others (n = 64)	10.42 (2.356)	0.568	<0.001**
	White (n = 114)	9.26 (1.839)		
Engagement (4-item)	Lifelong Learning (n = 102)	13.96 (1.768)	1.000	<0.001**
	Congregate Meal (n = 76)	11.29 (3.540)		
Enjoyment (3-item)	Lifelong Learning (n = 101)	9.11 (1.691)	-0.649	<0.001**
	Congregate Meal (n = 78)	10.41 (2.355)		

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$. Cohen's $d \leq 0.2$ (small effect); medium effect ≤ 0.5 ; large effect ≥ 0.8 . HS = High School.

Regressions on Aging Attitudes

Linear regression analyses were further conducted to better control for demographics, including age (<75 or 75+), marital status (married or single), race (white or others), and education (college or lower). Regression analyses on “Engagement” revealed a significant model ($F = 8.49$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the NLP group still endorsed lower engagement attitudes (coefficient beta = -0.564 ; $p < 0.001$), while none of the other demographics reached significance (Table 4A). Regression analyses on “Enjoyment” also showed a significant model ($F = 6.33$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the NLP group still endorsed higher enjoyment attitudes (coefficient beta = 0.331 ; $p < 0.014$), while individuals over 75 years also endorsed lower “Enjoyment” (beta = -0.191 ; $p = 0.02$) (Table 4B).

Table 4. Aging Attitudes among older adults participating in lifelong learning versus congregate meal programs, controlling for demographics (age, marital, race, & education).

(A) Dependent variable: Engagement-4 (model $F = 8.489$; $p < 0.001$).

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value
(Constant)	-	9.402	<0.001**
Age (≥ 75 / < 75)	0.019	0.233	0.816
Marital (Married/Others)	-0.077	-0.958	0.339
Race (White/Others)	-0.190	-1.760	0.080
Education (High School/College)	0.085	0.971	0.333
Group (Congregate Meals/Lifelong)	-0.564	-4.332	<0.001**

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$.

(B). Dependent variable: Enjoyment-3 (model $F = 6.332$; $p < 0.001$).

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value
(Constant)	-	6.483	<0.001**
Age (≥ 75 / < 75)	-0.191	-2.349	0.020*
Marital (Married/Others)	-0.158	-1.939	0.054
Race (White/Others)	-0.100	-0.894	0.373
Education (High School/College)	0.094	1.038	0.301
Group (Congregate Meals/Lifelong)	0.331	2.473	0.014*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$.

DISCUSSION

The final aging attitudes validated scale used in this study comprises 7 items, indicating two clear factors consistent with established theory and evidence among community-dwelling older adults. The reliability of the two-factor scales was satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.764 for the engagement scale (4-item) and 0.634 for the enjoyment scale (3-item). The relatively lower reliability of the enjoyment scale may be attributed to its limited number of items, as shorter scales often yield lower Cronbach's alpha values. Additionally, the construct of "enjoyment" may encompass diverse and subjective attitudes, leading to greater response variability. To improve reliability, future studies could refine and expand the scale to include more items that capture the multidimensional nature of enjoyment.

The findings reveal that LLP participants exhibited higher levels of engagement, characterized by activities such as taking on responsibilities, helping others, and volunteering, while NLP participants expressed greater enjoyment toward aging, valuing relaxation and life enjoyment. Moreover, LLP participants reported higher overall self-rated quality of life and health compared to NLP participants. These results provide actionable insights for tailoring community programs to diverse perceptions of aging. For instance, LLP-like programs can incorporate elements such as structured learning opportunities, intergenerational mentoring, or volunteer initiatives, which have been shown to enhance engagement and intellectual stimulation [20,21]. Conversely, NLP-like programs could integrate leisurely social activities, wellness sessions, or creative arts workshops, fostering enjoyment and relaxation among participants [20,21].

Both engagement and enjoyment represent positive attitudes towards aging. However, as individuals age, the types of activities they choose may change from those pursued earlier in life. Research suggests that engaging in mentally stimulating activities can significantly benefit cognitive health in later life. The Selective Engagement Theory [28] suggests that engagement in demanding activities is influenced by the associated costs, leading to selective participation driven by changes in motivation. A recent study explored the factors influencing engagement, particularly examining the relationship between the costs of engaging cognitive resources, intrinsic motivation, and participation in daily activities [29]. The findings underscored the importance of offering tailored and culturally relevant activities to promote program participation.

Conversely, a complementary concept of selective disengagement has been proposed. Kleiber and Nimrod [18] argued that innovation in activities can foster enjoyment and meaning, contributing to successful aging. Building on this notion, Kleiber et al. [30] introduced the concept of selective disengagement, suggesting that reduced participation in certain activities due to age-related physical limitations to focus on those they find more meaningful or manageable may actually enhance quality of life.

Wenzel and colleagues [31] conducted a scoping review on leisure activity, aiming to identify and explore the attributes and characteristics of leisure engagement to offer more meaningful intervention directions than merely recommending engagement in particular activities or activity domains. Their findings suggest that the way leisure is experienced, including attributes such as frequency, intensity, duration, and variety, as well as characteristics like novelty, active/productive engagement, enjoyment, meaning, and self-direction, may play crucial roles in protecting against cognitive decline in aging. Instead of focusing on any specific leisure activity or category of activities, attention to these dimensions, attributes, and characteristics could inform culturally appropriate and effective program development in the future [31].

The current results reveal that various demographic factors are linked to diverse attitudes toward aging. Specifically, individuals with a college education, white ethnicity, and those who are married tend to lean towards embracing engagement attitudes more strongly. On the flip side, single individuals, those with a high school education or lower, and minorities are more inclined towards enjoyment attitudes. These findings indicate that socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds play a significant role in shaping how older adults view and approach aging.

Individuals with higher levels of education and those in marital relationships may have better access to resources and social support networks. Consequently, they are maybe more likely to adopt a proactive approach to aging, valuing continued participation in social, physical, and cognitive activities as avenues for growth and contribution.

Conversely, single individuals, those with lower educational attainment, and minorities may face greater obstacles and limitations, leading them to prioritize relaxation and leisure more. These findings underscore the importance of taking socioeconomic and demographic factors into account when designing programs and policies to promote healthy aging. Tailoring interventions to meet the distinct needs and preferences of different demographic groups can ensure that all older adults have opportunities to engage in meaningful activities and enjoy a high quality of life.

In line with current findings, Nimrod and Adoni [32] observed that minorities were more inclined toward two active leisure styles, termed ‘culture enthusiasts’ and ‘sophisticated choosers’. These groups reported higher satisfaction levels in both leisure and overall life, supporting Havighurst’s ‘activity theory’ [33]. These findings suggest that a considerable portion of the retired population in the mainstream society may not be adequately equipped to embrace ‘active leisure’. Additionally, a recent study by [34] highlighted a prevalence of passive leisure among older adults, with limited engagement in cultural activities and moderate levels of social and physical leisure pursuits. To promote greater involvement in active leisure among older adults, which benefits individuals and society, enhanced guidance and support are essential.

This study explores well-supported constructs of aging attitudes, such as engagement and enjoyment, and their role in healthy aging. By providing a validated measurement tool, it helps researchers and program coordinators assess perceptions of aging effectively. The findings reveal significant differences in perceptions of aging among older adults in different community programs, highlighting the influence of key demographic factors. Engagement attitudes in LLP participants reflect active participation, while enjoyment attitudes in NLP participants align with prioritizing attainable, meaningful goals. However, the generalizability of these theories across diverse cultural contexts requires further examination, as perceptions of aging may vary significantly due to cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors. The current findings highlight the potential influence of key demographic factors on these attitudes. Additionally, in collectivist cultures, interdependence and family roles may shape engagement differently compared to individualistic contexts, where independence is prioritized.

While these findings are valuable, several limitations should be noted. The sample may not fully represent the broader older adult population, particularly those not involved in community programs. The cross-sectional design also limits causal inferences about the relationship between program participation and perceptions of aging. Additionally, cultural factors influencing perceptions of aging were not explored in depth. The lower alpha for the enjoyment scale suggests less internal consistency, indicating variability in how participants interpret and respond to the items. This may potentially affect the strength and clarity of observed relationships. Future studies should refine the enjoyment scale to improve reliability and ensure stronger conclusions. Future research could address these constraints by including more diverse populations, employing longitudinal designs, and examining cultural influences on perceptions of aging. These efforts would deepen our understanding and enhance the applicability of tailored interventions for promoting healthy aging.

To effectively support healthy aging, community programs should be tailored to accommodate diverse aging attitudes. For individuals with higher engagement attitudes, prioritize activities that encourage learning, social interaction, and physical activity. For those with enjoyment attitudes, focus on relaxation and leisure. Resources should be allocated to ensure inclusivity across socioeconomic backgrounds, with targeted efforts to engage single individuals, those with lower educational attainment, and minority groups. Future research should monitor changes in perceptions of aging over time, test interventions to shift these attitudes, and assess their impact on health and well-being. Additionally, refining the aging attitudes assessment tool for broader application could provide more nuanced insights.

This study highlights the importance of tailoring community programs to address diverse aging attitudes, emphasizing their impact on quality of

life and health. While engagement and enjoyment attitudes are central to healthy aging, broader lifestyle factors, such as physical activity, diet, and social interaction, also play a significant role. Future research could examine how aging attitudes intersect with lifestyle factors like medication use, including polypharmacy and antidepressants, which are common in older adults [35]. Polypharmacy can negatively affect physical and mental health, potentially shaping attitudes toward aging, while antidepressants may influence perceptions of engagement and enjoyment. Exploring these connections could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between attitudes, lifestyle, and health outcomes in this population.

In conclusion, this study identifies two distinct aging attitudes—engagement and enjoyment—among participants in neighborhood lunch (NLP) and lifelong learning programs (LLP). LLP participants emphasized responsibility and social contribution, while NLP participants prioritized enjoyment and relaxation. These findings highlight the need for tailored community programs that consider demographic and psychosocial factors. Policymakers and community leaders should develop LLP-like programs that emphasize intellectual stimulation, lifelong learning, and opportunities for social contribution to foster a sense of purpose and engagement. Simultaneously, NLP-like programs should focus on creating stress-free environments that promote relaxation, social bonding, and enjoyment. Targeted efforts should also prioritize engaging underrepresented groups, such as single individuals, minorities, and those with lower educational attainment, ensuring equitable access to programs that enhance quality of life. By aligning community initiatives with participants' values and attitudes, these interventions can support healthier, more satisfying aging experiences across diverse populations.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Ethics Approval

IRB approval numbers—This study has been approved as an exempt study by the UCF Institutional Review Board (SBE-17-12893; April 26th, 2017).

A cover page with consent information was provided with the paper-survey version and “click-through consent page” for the online survey version, before participants voluntarily agreed to take part of the anonymous survey.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The dataset of the study is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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