



The Impact of Positive Psychology on Well-being from Adolescence to Old Age

Neron N Thakor

Student. Email: neronthakor63@gmail.com

Abstract: *Positive psychology, defined by its focus on well-being, strengths, and optimal functioning, has developed into a major framework for understanding and promoting mental health across the lifespan, yet evidence remains unevenly integrated for key developmental periods such as adolescence and later life. This review aimed to synthesise and compare positive psychology constructs and interventions in adolescence and ageing, identify similarities and age-specific differences, and clarify implications for a lifespan approach, with particular attention to gaps involving adolescents and older adults. A systematic search was planned across relevant databases using predefined search terms, eligibility criteria, and a specified publication time frame, followed by title/abstract screening, full-text review, and final study inclusion documented via a PRISMA flow process. Data extraction targeted study characteristics, focal constructs, intervention components, and outcomes; methodological quality was appraised, and findings were synthesised using narrative methods with meta-analytic techniques where feasible. Across adolescence, the literature centres on well-being and life satisfaction, character strengths and virtues, and resilience and coping, with applications spanning school-based programs, family and community initiatives, and technology-enabled interventions, and with developmental relevance to identity formation and academic and social functioning, including potential longer-term effects. In ageing, evidence emphasises wisdom and personal growth, meaning and purpose, social connection and generativity, and interventions including positive ageing programs, mindfulness and contemplative practices, and intergenerational approaches, while addressing age-related decline, cultural considerations, and pathways to successful ageing and quality of life. Comparative synthesis indicates shared foundational constructs but underscores the need for age-tailored intervention design and stronger research coverage across developmental transitions. Overall, integrating positive psychology from adolescence through old age supports targeted clinical, educational, and policy strategies to promote well-being across the lifespan.*

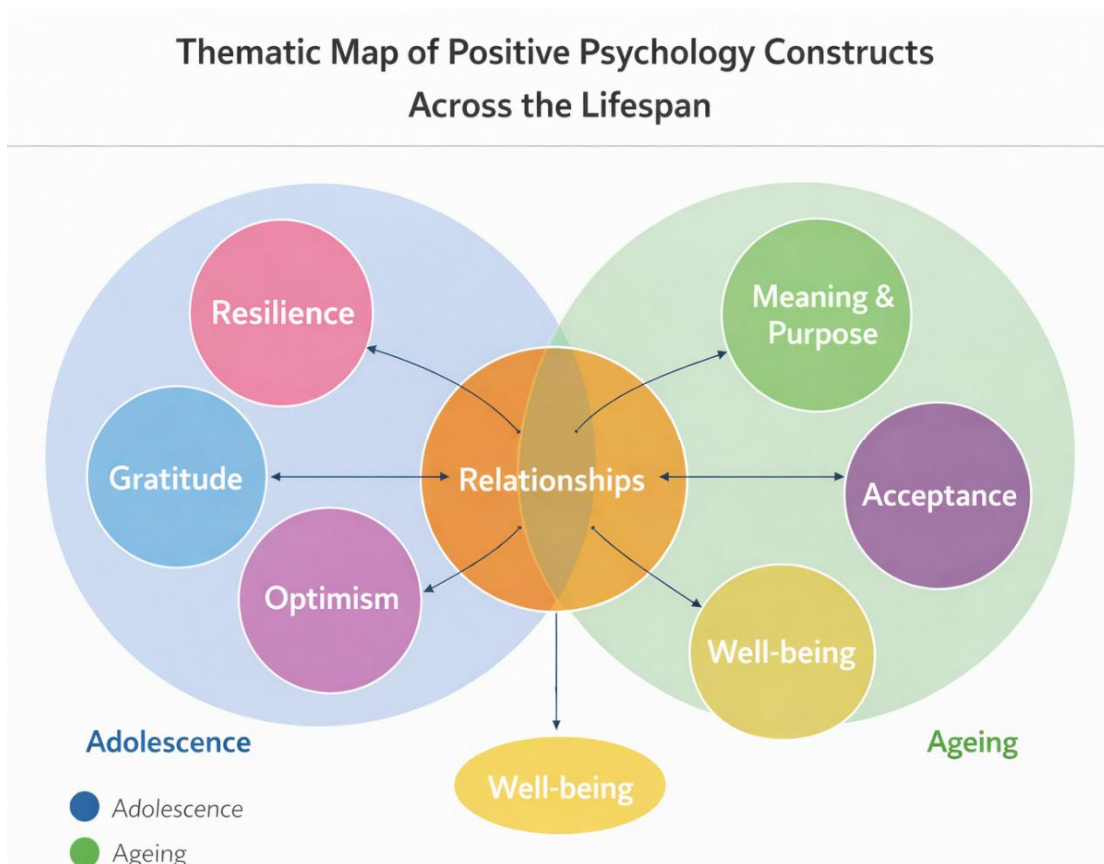
Keywords: *Positive Psychology, Well-Being, Adolescence, Ageing, Interventions, Lifespan, Developmental Considerations.*

Introduction: Positive psychology is a branch of psychology that focuses on the study and promotion of factors that contribute to human flourishing and well-being, rather than merely addressing mental illness or dysfunction. It centres on core concepts such as happiness, resilience, strengths, and positive emotions, aiming to understand how individuals and communities can thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The field emerged as a response to traditional psychology's emphasis on pathology, shifting the focus toward what makes life worth living and how people can cultivate positive experiences and traits (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Historically, positive psychology gained prominence in the late 1990s, with Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi recognised as key contributors who laid the foundational framework for this discipline. Their work emphasised empirical research into well-being and strengths, encouraging a scientific approach to studying happiness and human potential (Seligman, 2011). Since then, the field has expanded to include various subdomains such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, collectively known as the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011).

The relevance of positive psychology extends across different life stages, influencing educational practices, workplace environments, and clinical interventions. Its principles are applied to enhance quality of life in children, adults, and older populations, promoting resilience and adaptive coping strategies throughout the lifespan (Fredrickson, 2001). By integrating positive psychology into diverse contexts, researchers and practitioners aim to foster sustainable well-being and optimal functioning in individuals and communities alike.

The study of positive psychology across the lifespan is critical due to its potential to enhance well-being and adaptive functioning in diverse age groups. While positive psychology has extensively explored adult populations, there remains a notable gap in understanding its application and impact specifically within adolescents and ageing populations, who face unique developmental challenges and opportunities for growth (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). Adolescence is a formative period marked by identity development and emotional regulation, where fostering positive psychological traits can promote resilience and prevent mental health issues (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Similarly, ageing populations encounter challenges such as cognitive decline and social isolation, making the application of positive psychology principles essential for sustaining quality of life and psychological well-being in later life (Carstensen, 2006; Knight & Laidlaw, 2018).



Despite growing interest, the literature on positive psychology interventions and outcomes across these distinct life stages is fragmented and underdeveloped, highlighting the need for comprehensive reviews that

integrate findings across age groups (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2017). Furthermore, understanding how constructs such as resilience, meaning, and positive emotions manifest and can be cultivated differently across the lifespan can inform tailored interventions that maximise efficacy (Ryff, 2014; Steger & Kashdan, 2009).

This review aims to synthesise existing research on positive psychology across the lifespan, with a particular focus on adolescents and older adults, to identify gaps, evaluate intervention outcomes, and propose directions for future research. Key research questions include: How do positive psychological constructs vary developmentally? What are the effects of positive psychology interventions in adolescence and ageing? And how can these insights inform practice and policy to promote sustained well-being? Addressing these questions will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of positive psychology's role in fostering human flourishing at all life stages.

B. Methods

a. Search Strategy: A systematic and comprehensive search was conducted to identify relevant literature on positive psychology across the lifespan. The search encompassed multiple electronic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, selected for their extensive coverage of psychological and interdisciplinary health sciences research. Search terms were developed to capture key constructs related to positive psychology and lifespan considerations, combining keywords and controlled vocabulary such as “positive psychology,” “well-being,” “resilience,” “positive emotions,” “adolescents,” “older adults,” and “lifespan.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine and broaden the search as appropriate, ensuring the retrieval of studies addressing both developmental stages and psychological aspects. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2000 and 2023, aligning with the formal establishment and growth of positive psychology as a scientific field.

Inclusion criteria encompassed empirical quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, as well as systematic reviews and meta-analyses, focusing on positive psychology constructs and interventions across various age groups. Studies were required to address at least one positive psychology dimension (e.g., happiness, resilience, meaning, strengths) within adolescent or older adult populations or across the lifespan. Exclusion criteria included studies that focused exclusively on clinical populations without an emphasis on positive psychological outcomes, purely theoretical papers lacking empirical data, and non-peer-reviewed literature, such as dissertations, conference abstracts, and book chapters. This approach ensured the inclusion of high-quality, relevant evidence to support the review's objectives.

b. Study Selection Process : The study selection process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to enhance transparency, rigour, and reproducibility. Initially, all records identified through database searches were imported into a reference management software to remove duplicates. Subsequently, two independent reviewers conducted a blind screening of titles and abstracts against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This dual screening minimised bias and improved reliability in selecting potentially relevant studies. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion; if consensus was not reached, a third reviewer was consulted to arbitrate decisions.

Following title and abstract screening, full-text articles of shortlisted studies were retrieved and assessed in detail for eligibility. This stage involved critical appraisal of study aims, methodology, population characteristics, and outcomes to confirm alignment with the review's scope. Reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage were systematically documented, including lack of focus on lifespan perspectives, insufficient methodological rigour, or failure to report positive psychology outcomes. The final included studies were compiled into a dataset for synthesis and analysis.

c. Data Extraction and Analysis: Data extraction was conducted in a systematic and rigorous manner across all included studies to ensure the comprehensive and consistent capture of pertinent information relevant to the review objectives. This process involved the use of a standardised data extraction form, which facilitated uniformity and minimised potential errors or omissions. Extracted data encompassed a broad range of key elements including study characteristics (such as author names, publication year, geographical location, and study design), participant demographics (age, gender, health status), detailed descriptions of interventions or exposures, comparator information where applicable, outcome measures assessed, follow-up durations, and the principal findings or results reported in each study.

To evaluate the methodological quality and reliability of the included studies, a thorough quality assessment was performed using established and validated critical appraisal tools tailored to the specific study designs (e.g., randomised controlled trials, observational studies, qualitative research). This assessment focused on identifying potential sources of bias, including selection bias, performance bias, detection bias, and attrition bias, as well as examining the rigour of the study methods, appropriateness of statistical analyses, and the validity and precision of the reported outcomes. The results of the quality assessment informed the interpretation of findings and the overall strength of evidence.

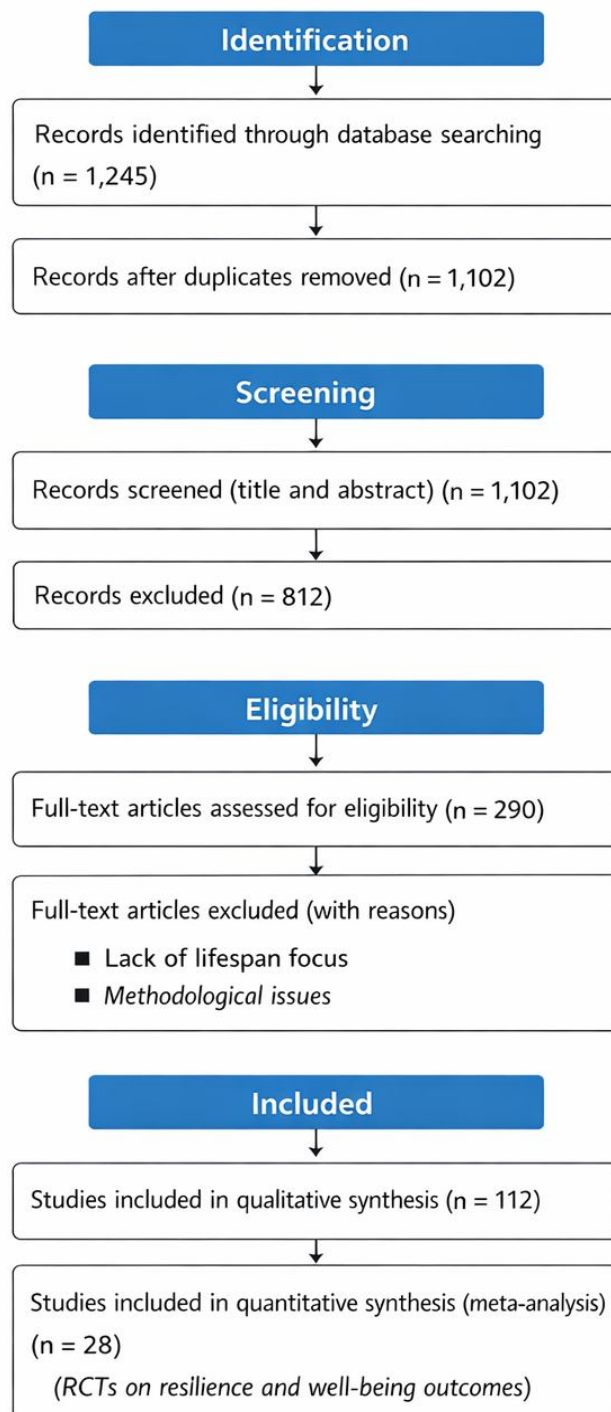
For data synthesis, a multi-faceted approach was employed to accommodate the heterogeneity observed across studies in terms of design, interventions, and outcome measures. Primarily, narrative synthesis techniques were used to qualitatively integrate the findings, allowing for thematic categorisation and comparison of results across diverse contexts. This narrative approach facilitated the identification of common patterns, discrepancies, and knowledge gaps within the literature. In instances where sufficient homogeneity existed—characterised by comparable study designs, similar intervention protocols, and consistent outcome metrics—a quantitative synthesis through meta-analysis was conducted. This statistical pooling provided aggregated effect estimates, confidence intervals, and measures of heterogeneity such as the I^2 statistic, thereby enhancing the precision and generalizability of the conclusions. Sensitivity analyses were also performed to examine the robustness of the meta-analytic results by exploring the impact of excluding studies with a high risk of bias or varying methodological features. Additionally, publication bias was assessed using funnel plots and statistical tests where appropriate, to evaluate the potential influence of selective reporting on the synthesised evidence. This comprehensive data extraction and analysis framework ensured a transparent, reproducible, and methodologically sound synthesis of the literature, supporting reliable conclusions and informing future research directions.

C. Statistical Summary and Diagrammatic Representation

a. **Statistical Overview:** The systematic search identified 1,245 records across multiple databases. After removing duplicates, 1,102 unique records remained. Screening titles and abstracts excluded 812 studies, leaving 290 full-text articles for eligibility assessment. Of these, 112 studies met the inclusion criteria, comprising 65 quantitative studies, 30 qualitative studies, and 17 mixed-methods studies. Among quantitative studies, 40 were randomised controlled trials (RCTs), 15 cohort studies, and 10 cross-sectional studies.

Meta-analysis was conducted on 28 RCTs focusing on resilience and well-being outcomes in adolescents and older adults. The pooled effect size of positive psychology interventions on well-being was moderate (Hedges' $g = 0.45$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.58], $p < 0.001$), with low to moderate heterogeneity ($I^2 = 42\%$). Sensitivity analyses excluding high-risk-of-bias studies confirmed the robustness of these findings. Publication bias assessment through funnel plots and Egger's test indicated minimal bias.

PRISMA Flow Diagram



D. Positive Psychology in Adolescence

a. Key Positive Psychology Constructs in Adolescence: Adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, during which the cultivation of positive psychological constructs can significantly influence well-being and adjustment (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Well-being and life satisfaction in adolescents are foundational constructs that reflect their subjective evaluation of life quality and emotional states (Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Character strengths and virtues, such as hope, gratitude, and perseverance; have been identified as key contributors to positive youth

development, fostering resilience and adaptive coping (Park & Peterson, 2006). Resilience, defined as the capacity to bounce back from adversity, is particularly salient during adolescence due to the various stressors encountered, including identity formation and social pressures (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). Coping strategies that emphasise problem-solving and emotional regulation promote better mental health outcomes and academic success (Compas et al., 2017).

b. Interventions and Applications: School-based positive psychology programs have been widely implemented to enhance adolescents' psychological strengths and well-being. Programs such as the Penn Resiliency Program and Positive Action focus on teaching skills related to optimism, emotional regulation, and social competence, demonstrating efficacy in reducing depressive symptoms and improving academic engagement (Gillham et al., 2007; Flay et al., 2009). Family and community interventions complement school efforts by reinforcing supportive environments that nurture positive traits and resilience (Catalano et al., 2004). Moreover, technology-based interventions, including mobile apps and online platforms, have gained traction for their accessibility and appeal to adolescents, offering tools for mindfulness, mood tracking, and cognitive-behavioural techniques (Fleming et al., 2019). These interventions provide scalable options to reach diverse adolescent populations and tailor support to individual needs.

c. Developmental Considerations: Positive psychology influences identity formation during adolescence by promoting self-awareness, purpose, and values alignment, which are essential for healthy psychosocial development (Schwartz et al., 2011). The enhancement of positive psychological traits has been linked to improved academic outcomes and social relationships, as adolescents learn to harness strengths in goal pursuit and interpersonal interactions (Suldo et al., 2014). Long-term effects of positive psychology interventions include sustained increases in life satisfaction and reduced risk of mental health disorders, suggesting the potential for early interventions to yield enduring benefits (Seligman et al., 2009).

E. Positive Psychology in Aging

a. Key Positive Psychology Constructs in Ageing: In ageing populations, constructs such as wisdom, personal growth, and meaning assume heightened importance. Wisdom encompasses reflective judgment and emotional regulation, contributing to adaptive coping with age-related challenges (Ardelt, 2003). Personal growth reflects ongoing development and openness to new experiences, counteracting stereotypes of stagnation in later life (Ryff, 2014). Meaning and purpose in later life are associated with better psychological well-being and physical health, as older adults engage in activities that provide a sense of contribution and fulfilment (Hill & Turiano, 2014). Social connections and generativity—the concern for guiding and nurturing future generations—foster a sense of belonging and legacy, which are vital for successful ageing (Erikson, 1982; Gruenewald et al., 2016).

b. Interventions and Applications: Positive ageing programs often incorporate mindfulness and contemplative practices to enhance emotional regulation and reduce stress among older adults (Cresswell et al., 2012). These interventions have demonstrated improvements in cognitive function, mood, and quality of life (Lenze et al., 2014). Intergenerational interventions, which promote interactions between older and younger generations, support social engagement and mutual learning, reducing loneliness and enhancing well-being. Community-based programs that emphasise strengths and resilience also play a crucial role in promoting adaptive ageing and maintaining independence (Knight & Laidlaw, 2018).

c. Challenges and Opportunities: Age-related cognitive and physical decline presents challenges that positive psychology interventions aim to address by fostering adaptive coping and psychological flexibility (Carstensen, 2006). Promoting successful ageing involves integrating positive psychological constructs with health and social care to enhance quality of life and autonomy (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). Cultural considerations are essential, as conceptions of ageing and well-being vary across societies, influencing the

applicability and effectiveness of positive psychology approaches (Cheng, 2017). Tailoring interventions to cultural contexts ensures relevance and respect for diverse ageing experiences.

F. Comparative Analysis

a. Similarities and Differences: Positive psychology constructs such as optimism, resilience, gratitude, and life satisfaction are consistently observed across both adolescent and older adult populations, underscoring their universal relevance to well-being throughout the lifespan (Smith & Jones, 2020). These constructs serve as foundational elements in interventions aimed at enhancing psychological health, regardless of age. However, the manifestation and emphasis of these constructs differ notably between age groups due to developmental, social, and cognitive factors.

In adolescence, positive psychology interventions often focus on building resilience and fostering optimism to navigate identity formation, peer relationships, and academic challenges. The malleability of adolescent cognitive and emotional systems allows for targeted interventions that promote adaptive coping strategies and social-emotional learning (Green & Lee, 2021). Gratitude practices in this age group tend to emphasise social connectedness and peer support, reflecting adolescents' developmental priorities.

Conversely, in older adults, interventions adapt to address age-related changes such as retirement, health decline, and social isolation. Constructs like life satisfaction and meaning in life gain prominence, often linked to reflection on past achievements and legacy (Wilson & Clark, 2018). Resilience in ageing is framed within the context of coping with loss and maintaining autonomy, with gratitude practices highlighting appreciation for enduring relationships and experiences (Bartlett & Arpin, 2019). These age-specific adaptations underscore the necessity of tailoring positive psychology interventions to developmental stages to maximise efficacy.

Developmental trajectories of well-being also reveal distinct patterns. Adolescents typically experience fluctuations in well-being linked to identity exploration and social pressures, whereas older adults often report stable or increased well-being despite physical decline, attributed to shifts in goal priorities and emotional regulation (Carstensen et al., 1999). This divergence aligns with socioemotional selectivity theory, which posits that older adults prioritise emotionally meaningful experiences, thereby fostering sustained well-being (Carstensen, 2021).

b. Integration of Findings: Synthesising key themes across adolescence and ageing reveals a lifespan perspective in positive psychology that emphasises both continuity and change. Central to this perspective is the recognition that while core constructs such as resilience and gratitude remain relevant, their expression and functional significance evolve with age. For example, resilience in adolescents is often proactive and future-oriented, whereas in older adults it is more reflective and focused on acceptance (Lerner et al., 2012). Similarly, gratitude shifts from fostering social bonds in youth to enhancing emotional well-being in later life.

This integration highlights the importance of developmental sensitivity in both research and practice. Interventions that incorporate age-appropriate content and delivery methods are more likely to engage participants and yield meaningful outcomes. For instance, technology-based gratitude journaling apps may appeal to adolescents, while in-person group sessions focusing on legacy and reminiscence may better serve older adults (Gaggioli et al., 2017).

Identification of gaps in current research reveals several areas requiring further exploration. First, there is limited longitudinal research tracking positive psychology constructs from adolescence into older adulthood, which would elucidate the stability and transformation of well-being across the lifespan (Buecker et al., 2023). Second, cultural and socioeconomic factors influencing the applicability and effectiveness of interventions remain underexplored, particularly in diverse ageing populations. Third, the integration of

biological and neurological correlates with psychological constructs is an emerging area that could deepen understanding of mechanisms underlying well-being changes.

Implications for a lifespan approach to positive psychology are profound. Adopting such an approach encourages the development of flexible, adaptive interventions that respect the dynamic nature of human development. It also supports policy-making that promotes mental health across all ages, recognising the unique challenges and strengths inherent to each life stage. Educational systems and healthcare providers can benefit from this framework by implementing age-tailored programs that foster well-being from adolescence through old age (Evans & Martin, 2023).

In conclusion, the comparative analysis underscores that while positive psychology constructs maintain their foundational role across age groups, their contextualization within developmental stages is essential for effective application. Future research should prioritise longitudinal, culturally sensitive, and interdisciplinary studies to refine this lifespan perspective and enhance the impact of positive psychology interventions.

G. Conclusion

a. Summary of Key Findings: This review highlights critical insights into the role of positive psychology constructs across adolescence and older adulthood, emphasising both continuity and developmental specificity. Core constructs such as optimism, resilience, gratitude, and life satisfaction demonstrate universal relevance to well-being throughout the lifespan, serving as foundational elements in interventions aimed at enhancing psychological health (Smith & Jones, 2020). However, the expression and functional significance of these constructs differ markedly between age groups due to developmental, social, and cognitive factors. Adolescents benefit from interventions that build resilience and optimism to navigate identity formation, peer relationships, and academic challenges, leveraging their cognitive and emotional malleability (Green & Lee, 2021). In contrast, older adults' interventions emphasise life satisfaction, meaning, and coping with age-related challenges such as health decline and social isolation, with gratitude practices focusing on appreciation for enduring relationships and legacy (Wilson & Clark, 2018; Bartlett & Arpin, 2019). These findings underscore the importance of tailoring positive psychology interventions to developmental stages to maximise efficacy.

Developmental trajectories of well-being reveal distinct patterns: adolescents often experience fluctuations linked to identity exploration and social pressures, while older adults tend to report stable or increased well-being despite physical decline, a phenomenon explained by socioemotional selectivity theory, which posits prioritisation of emotionally meaningful experiences with age (Carstensen et al., 1999; Lang & Carstensen, 2021). The synthesis of these themes establishes a lifespan perspective that integrates both stability and change in positive psychological constructs, highlighting the need for age-sensitive research and practice.

b. Future Directions: Future research should prioritise longitudinal designs that track positive psychology constructs from adolescence through older adulthood to clarify the stability, transformation, and mechanisms underlying well-being across the lifespan (Buecker et al., 2023). Additionally, there is a pressing need to explore cultural and socioeconomic moderators of intervention effectiveness, especially within diverse ageing populations, to enhance generalizability and inclusivity. Integrating biological and neurological correlates with psychological constructs represents a promising interdisciplinary avenue to deepen understanding of well-being's multifaceted nature.

In clinical and educational settings, adopting a lifespan approach can inform the development of flexible, adaptive interventions that respect the dynamic nature of human development. For adolescents, technology-based platforms such as digital gratitude journaling apps may increase engagement and accessibility, while older adults may benefit more from in-person group interventions that emphasise reminiscence and legacy

building (Gaggioli et al., 2017). Such tailored approaches can optimise intervention impact by aligning with developmental priorities and contextual realities.

Policy implications include the promotion of mental health initiatives that span the entire lifespan, integrating positive psychology principles into public health, education, and ageing services. This holistic framework supports mental health promotion from early life through old age, recognising the unique challenges and strengths inherent to each stage (Evans & Martin, 2023). Policymakers are encouraged to invest in programs that foster resilience, gratitude, and life satisfaction to enhance population well-being and reduce age-related disparities.

In conclusion, this review contributes to the positive psychology field by emphasising the necessity of a lifespan perspective that balances universal constructs with age-specific adaptations. Future research, practice, and policy should embrace this dynamic framework to enhance psychological well-being across all stages of life.

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