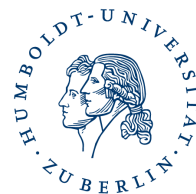


Press Release

30 June 2021



Modernization makes older adults feel rushed, too

New international study on time perception among older adults

Rapid societal changes can leave us feeling more rushed and pressured for time – and older adults are no exception, new research finds, led by Weill Cornell Medicine with participation of researchers of Humboldt University.

The phenomenon known as “social acceleration” – in which economic growth and modernization increase the sense of time pressure – has mostly been studied in younger and middle-aged working adults, said Corinna Loeckenhoff, professor in the Department of Human Development in the College of Human Ecology and associate professor of gerontology in medicine at Weill Cornell Medicine.

But the new study by an international team of collaborators is the first to show similar effects among older adults long out of the workforce. For them, the researchers speculated, balancing leisure and volunteer engagements or pursuit of a “bucket list” might account for feeling greater time pressure compared with a generation ago.

“It is well documented that people tend to feel more rushed as societies move towards modernization, and changes in the workplace were thought to play a key role in raising the sense of time pressure,” Loeckenhoff said. “But we’re finding that older adults are feeling more rushed as well. This suggests other factors such as leisure activities and everyday social interactions contribute to these effects.”

Loeckenhoff is the lead author of “Sociohistorical Change in Urban Older Adults’ Perceived Speed of Time and Time Pressure,” published June 28 in *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*. Ten co-authors included researchers at several institutions in Berlin, including Humboldt University, the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) and the Charité Universitätsmedizin, as well as other collaborators in Germany, Switzerland and the U.S.

The scholars analyzed a pair of datasets called the Berlin Aging Studies (BASE I and BASE II), collected about 25 years apart. The first involved more than 250 older adults who rated their perceptions of time in the early 1990s. The same questions were posed in the mid-2010s, and the researchers matched a sample based on age and education to compare with the earlier cohort.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Department of Communications,
Marketing and Events
Media and Communications Office

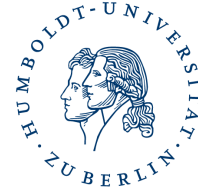
Unter den Linden 6
10099 Berlin
Tel.: +49 30 2093-2946
Fax: +49 30 2093-2107
www.hu-berlin.de/en

Press Spokesperson

Hans-Christoph Keller
Tel.: +49 30 2093-2946
hans-christoph.keller@hu-berlin.de

Expert database

www.hu-berlin.de/en/press-portal/experts



None of the aging study respondents were working, since Germany until recently had a mandatory retirement age of 65. And the researchers noted that in the wake of German reunification, Berlin experienced dramatic socioeconomic and political changes during the period spanned by the two surveys.

“Berlin is an ideal location to study social acceleration because the city has changed so much in recent decades,” said co-author Denis Gerstorf, professor of psychology at Humboldt University. “The rich data from the BASE studies allow us to document the implications of that change for older adults.”

Contemporary older adults reported more time pressure than their same-aged peers from the 1990s, the researchers found. Respondents were also asked how fast time was passing, and although there was no change in the average perceived speed of time, contemporary older adults showed greater variability in their responses.

The findings imply, the team wrote, that “accelerative forces operate not just via the workplace but well into the post-retirement phase.”

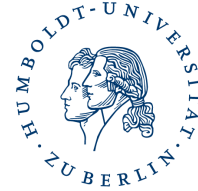
Changes in time perception are important to understand because they may have negative health implications, the researchers said. In the context of the workplace, perceived time pressure is associated with poorer physical health, stress, elevated blood pressure and symptoms of depression, but it is not clear whether these effects extend to later life.

The new study examined respondents’ health, cognitive ability and feelings of well-being or loneliness, but Loeckenhoff said more research is needed to understand what may be causing older adults’ growing perception of being rushed.

“Although some of these factors were linked with time perception,” she said, “none could account for the differences between the two cohorts.”

In future work, Loeckenhoff said, the team hopes to explore whether its findings extend to a wider range of populations and examine the role of specific activities such as hobbies and volunteering. One of the study’s co-authors, Alexandra Freund of the University of Zurich, has proposed the “bucket list effect” as a possible contributor of time pressure, as older adults increasingly pursue leisure and social goals they had put off while working.

In Germany, Loeckenhoff said, where the phrase for retirement translates to “state of quiet,” healthy older residents now sometimes joke that they’re in a state of “unquiet” – in an active new phase of life – or that “70 is the new 60.”



“Just because people are out of the workforce doesn’t mean modernization is passing them by,” she said. “They’re still affected.”

The authors acknowledged funding support from German research organizations and government agencies that supported the Berlin Aging Studies.

Study

[“Sociohistorical Change in Urban Older Adults’ Perceived Speed of Time and Time Pressure”](#) in *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 28 June 2021

[Berlin Aging Study \(BASE I\)](#)
[Berlin Aging Study \(BASE II\)](#)

[Cornell Chronicle](#)

Contact

Dr. Johanna Drewelies
Postdoctoral Researcher
Humboldt University Berlin
Department of Psychology

Phone: +49 30 2093-4917
johanna.drewelies@hu-berlin.de