Happiness Matters in Aging with a Disability
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METHODS
Design & Setting: Cross-sectional postal survey in the community setting
Participants: 1862 adults (63.3% female; 59.3% married or cohabitating) with muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, post-polio syndrome, or spinal cord injury. The survey’s response rate was 91.2%
Main Outcome Measures: The Subjective Happiness Scale⁴ and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 Depression Scale² (PHQ-9).
Procedures: All participants completed the PHQ-9 and measures of demographics and comorbid conditions from the 2008 National Health Survey. A subset of the sample (n = 929) completed the Subjective Happiness Scale.

RESULTS
• Analyses examined levels of happiness for the total sample and for each disability condition individually across four age cohorts: 18-44, 45-64, 65-74, and 75+
• The sample’s mean happiness level varied between 5.04 (SD: 1.26) for those age 45-64 and 5.6 (SD: 1.16) for those age 65-74.
• Happiness differed significantly by disability condition and by age; older cohorts were happier than younger cohorts.
• Pain, vision loss, and falls were negatively correlated with happiness.

CONCLUSIONS
• The overall sample’s level of happiness for the sample was comparable to levels in other samples of adults without physical disabilities, including older adults.
• However, potentially meaningful differences exist between disability conditions and cohorts.
• Studying the full spectrum of psychosocial functioning, including happiness, may broaden our understanding of successful aging with physical disability.

REFERENCES

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