

Crises Like The Pandemic Don't Make People Less Optimistic

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One of the most startling things about people is the way they always think things are going to get better. It doesn't matter how ugly things get, humans are incurable optimists. And the older people get, the more positive they feel about the future. That's why the elderly are actually kicking our behinds when it comes to handling the coronavirus pandemic.

When ChumbaWamba sang these words, they expressed something fundamental about human nature, "I get knocked down, but I get up again. You're never gonna keep me down." Recent research has been chock full of studies showing just how resilient we really are.

Incurable optimism is part of being human

Beyond the sickness and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, experts worry about its long term effects on our outlook. It stands to reason that living through hard times could make us lose hope for the future. But a [recent study](#) contradicts that fear, finding that people are optimists, regardless of how hard things get.

According to William Chopik, assistant professor of psychology at Michigan State University and lead author of the paper, people become increasingly optimistic between the ages of 15 and 70. And despite popular belief, it has little to do with their life circumstances.

"Counterintuitively — and most surprising — we found that really hard things like deaths and divorce really didn't change a person's outlook to the future," Chopik said in a [press release](#). "This shows that a lot of people likely subscribe to the 'life is short' mantra and realize they should focus on things that make them happy and maintain emotional balance."

The idea that people are good at finding hope for their futures should not surprise us. When we lose hope we become depressed, and depression rapidly decreases our ability to solve problems effectively. So if our goal is to find a way to improve our lives even in difficult circumstances, it stands to reason that our set point would be a belief that things will get better.

"We oftentimes think that the really sad or tragic things that happen in life completely alter us as people, but that's not really the case," Chopik said. "You don't fundamentally change as a result of terrible things; people diagnosed with an illness or those who go through another crisis still felt positive about the future and what life had ahead for them on the other side."

We get happier as we get older

Dr. Deborah Heiser, a developmental psychologist who focuses on aging, was delighted by the study. "This article adds even more information to the studies conducted by others such as Laura Carstensen of

Stamford whose research shows that people get happier as they get older.”

Heiser believes passionately in human potential throughout the lifespan. “We are built to have a positive outlook on our future, no matter how close we get to the end of our lives. We begin to see ourselves as a meaningful part of the world, rather than just one lone person. We see ourselves as having skills and knowledge that are valuable,” she explains. Add the wisdom we gain as we get older and the result is optimism.

When you ask her about the potential of older adults, Heiser’s eyes light up. She has endless stories about retirees who are experts in their fields bubbling over with optimism about the next generation.

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