

Subjective Well-Being among Retired Older Adults in Vietnam: A Perspective from Health, Family Relations and Social Capital

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ABSTRACT: *This study examines the factors influencing the subjective well-being of retired older adults in the context of population ageing in Vietnam. Drawing on data from semi-structured interviews with retired older adults residing in both rural and urban areas, the findings reveal that their well-being is constructed through the interplay of health, family relationships, and social connectedness, thereby reflecting the nature of a relational form of welfare. Health is perceived as a fundamental condition for maintaining autonomy and engaging in everyday activities. Family relationships and intergenerational support constitute important emotional resources, while participation in social and community networks contributes to a sense of belonging and social recognition.*

KEYWORDS - *subjective well-being, happiness, retired older adults, family relationships, social connectedness*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is undergoing a rapid process of population ageing. According to the General Statistics Office (2021), the older population increased from 7.45 million to 11.41 million during the period 2009–2019, accounting for an increase from 8.68% to 11.86% of the total population. This proportion rose further to 12.80% in 2021 (General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021), reached 14.04% in 2024 (General Statistics Office, 2025), and is projected to increase to 16.5% by 2029, 20.21% by 2038, and 24.88% by 2049 (General Statistics Office, 2021). Population ageing not only poses challenges to economic development but also raises concerns regarding the provision of cultural and spiritual well-being, as well as social security, for older adults (Tuan & My, 2024; VNCA & UNFPA, 2019).

In recent years, subjective well-being has increasingly been recognized as an important indicator reflecting individuals' adaptation and quality of life, particularly among older adults who have exited the labour market and are experiencing significant changes in social roles, health status, and interpersonal relationships (Diener, 1984; Veenhoven, 2012). International studies suggest that well-being in later life is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of health conditions, economic resources, and various forms of social capital. The successful aging model proposed by Rowe and Kahn (1997) emphasizes the importance of health and active engagement in life; Ryan and Deci (2001) highlight the significance of social connectedness as a fundamental prerequisite for well-being and human flourishing while Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra (2011) demonstrate that family, friendship, and community networks are closely associated with the subjective well-being of older adults. Beyond material resources, a substantial body of research has emphasized the importance

of social capital, intergenerational relationships, and community engagement as key social resources that foster a sense of belonging, reduce loneliness, and enhance life satisfaction among older adults (Putnam, 2000; Berkman & Glass, 2000). From this perspective, well-being is not merely an individual psychological state but is socially constructed through interpersonal relationships and situated within specific cultural contexts.

In Vietnam, research on ageing and older adults has attracted increasing attention in response to the country's rapid demographic transition. Existing studies have largely focused on health, quality of life, and the economic conditions of older adults (Hoang et al., 2010; Le et al., 2010; Nilsson et al., 2012). More recent studies have begun to examine the relationship between health, intergenerational ties, and life satisfaction among older people (Quang et al., 2020). However, the subjective well-being of retired older adults, who are undergoing profound changes in social roles and relational networks, remains insufficiently explored. In particular, the role of social connectedness and everyday life experiences in shaping well-being in old age, as well as potential differences between rural and urban settings, has received limited scholarly attention in the Vietnamese context.

Addressing these gaps, this study conceptualizes subjective well-being as a form of relational welfare that emerges through the interplay between health, intergenerational relationships, and social connectedness. Drawing on qualitative data from in-depth interviews with retired older adults in Hanoi and Bac Giang Province (currently Bac Ninh Province), the study seeks to address three research questions: (1) What factors shape the subjective well-being of retired older adults? (2) How are health, family relationships, and social connectedness manifested in their everyday lives? and (3) Are there differences in the experience of well-being between older adults living in rural and urban areas? By answering these questions, the study contributes empirical evidence on the subjective well-being of older adults in Vietnam and highlights the significance of social resources and intergenerational relationships for mental well-being in the context of contemporary population ageing.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Subjective Well-Being and the Relational Welfare Approach

Subjective well-being is one of the central concepts in research on quality of life and human welfare. According to Diener (1984), subjective well-being reflects individuals' evaluations of their lives through two fundamental dimensions: affective and cognitive. The affective dimension refers to the frequency of positive and negative emotions, whereas the cognitive dimension concerns individuals' overall satisfaction with life. From this perspective, well-being is not merely a transient emotional state but rather an overall appraisal of life quality within specific social contexts.

Subsequent studies have distinguished between hedonic well-being, which emphasizes life satisfaction and positive affect, and eudaimonic well-being, which highlights meaning in life, a sense of purpose, and the realization of personal values (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For older adults, well-being is shaped not only by health and material conditions but also by feelings of being cared for, recognized, and able to maintain meaningful social roles.

Many scholars have argued that well-being should be understood as a relational and socially situated phenomenon, shaped by interpersonal relationships and the cultural contexts in which individuals live (White, 2010; Atkinson, 2013). From this perspective, subjective well-being is not solely an individual attribute but is constituted through interactions with family, community, and broader social networks. This approach is particularly relevant for older adults in East Asian societies, where intergenerational relationships and communitarian values continue to play important roles in everyday life. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes the subjective well-being of retired older adults as a form of relational welfare shaped by the interplay between health, family relationships, and social connectedness.

2.2. Activity Theory and the Maintenance of Social Roles in Old Age

One of the most influential perspectives in gerontological research is Activity Theory, originally developed by Havighurst (1961). This theory posits that life satisfaction in old age depends largely on the ability to maintain social roles and remain engaged in meaningful activities after retirement. Retirement from the labour

market does not necessarily imply withdrawal from social life; rather, older adults may reconstruct their roles through participation in community activities, voluntary associations, caregiving for grandchildren, or the maintenance of friendships.

Activity Theory emphasizes that social participation enables older adults to preserve a sense of usefulness, social recognition, and continuity of identity. Conversely, declining health or shrinking opportunities for social interaction may result in loneliness, role loss, and reduced life satisfaction. From this perspective, subjective well-being is not simply a product of material resources but is continuously generated through social interaction.

In the present study, Activity Theory is employed to explain how health and various forms of social participation contribute to the maintenance of subjective well-being among retired older adults.

2.3. Social Capital and Intergenerational Relationships as Resources for Well-Being

In addition to Activity Theory, this study approaches subjective well-being through the lens of social capital theory. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the aggregate of resources that individuals can mobilize through their social networks. Putnam (2000), in contrast, emphasizes the roles of trust, norms of reciprocity, and civic engagement in generating social capital.

For older adults, networks of family members, neighbours, friends, and communities provide not only material support but also emotional resources, a sense of belonging, and social recognition. Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bonding social capital, which arises from close relationships such as family and kinship ties, and bridging social capital, which is generated through broader connections with communities and social organizations. Both forms of social capital are crucial for the quality of life and psychological well-being of older adults.

In the context of population ageing and changing family structures in Vietnam, intergenerational relationships and community connectedness continue to serve as important social resources that enable older adults to maintain feelings of being cared for, valued, and needed, while mitigating loneliness. Meanwhile, the expansion of digital technologies and social media has created new forms of connection that further extend older adults' social networks.

Building upon these theoretical perspectives, this study assumes that the subjective well-being of retired older adults is constructed through the interaction of three fundamental dimensions: health, family relationships, and social connectedness. Health provides the basis for maintaining social activities; family relationships offer emotional resources and intergenerational support; and community and social networks generate a sense of belonging and social recognition. The interaction among these dimensions contributes to the formation and maintenance of subjective well-being in the everyday lives of retired older adults.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study draws on qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the project entitled *Exploring the Effects of Social Interaction on Well-being and Loneliness among Retired Seniors*. This research is part of an international initiative titled "Building Proactive Resilience in Asian Developing Countries Making Good Use of Social Capital" (coordinated by Masayuki Kanai, FY2022-2024). The project is subsidized by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and is being implemented at the Center for Social Well-being Studies, Institute for the Development of Social Intelligence, Senshu University and represented one of the research tasks carried out by early-career researchers participating in the three-year programme (2022-2024), including the author in Vietnam. A qualitative approach was adopted to explore how retired older adults perceive and construct subjective well-being in their everyday lives. Unlike quantitative studies that primarily measure well-being through standardized indicators, the qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences, meanings, and the social contexts through which retired older adults interpret their sense of well-being.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 retired older adults selected using purposive sampling. Participants met three inclusion criteria: (1) being between 60 and 79 years of age; (2) having previously engaged in full-time employment and subsequently retired, with no current involvement in income-generating activities; and (3) residing in either urban or rural areas. The study interviewed 12 retired older adults living in an urban ward of Hanoi and 12 retired older adults residing in a rural commune of Bac Giang Province (now Bac Ninh Province). Data collection was conducted in two phases. The first phase, undertaken in January 2023, involved in-depth interviews with ten urban participants. The second phase, conducted in April 2023, included interviews with two additional urban participants and twelve rural participants.

The interview guide focused on four broad themes: (i) older adults' perceptions and experiences of happiness during retirement; (ii) the role of health in shaping quality of life; (iii) family relationships and intergenerational support; and (iv) social participation, community relationships, and changes in everyday life following retirement. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The data were coded, processed, and analysed using thematic analysis. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: health and the ability to maintain daily activities; family relationships and intergenerational support; and social connectedness and a sense of community belonging.

With regard to research ethics, all participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study, their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the interview at any stage, and the exclusive use of the information for scientific research purposes. Personal names and identifying information were either anonymized or coded to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the retired older adults who participated in the study.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of retired older adults participating in semi-structure interviews

(Unit: persons)

Characteristics/Categories	Urban	Rural	Total	
Gender	Male	6	6	12
	Female	6	6	12
Age	60-69	8	5	13
	70-79	4	7	11
Educational attainment	High school	1	0	1
	Vocational or college education	0	11	11
	University degree	9	1	10
	Master's degree	2	0	2
Marital status	Married and living with spouse	8	11	19
	Widowed	1	0	1
	Divorced	3	1	4
Living arrangement	Living with children	5	10	15
	Living independently from children	7	2	9

Use of social media (Facebook/Zalo/YouTube)	User	11	3	14
	Non-user	1	9	10
Employment sector before retirement	Public sector	10	12	22
	Private sector	2	0	2
Total		12	12	24

Source: Data from the project “Exploring the Influence of Social Interaction on Happiness and Loneliness among Retired Older Adults”.

Table 1 reveals several differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of retired older adults residing in urban and rural areas. With regard to age, rural participants were predominantly concentrated in the 70–79 age group, whereas urban participants were more likely to belong to the 60–69 age group. Educational attainment also differed markedly between the two groups. Most urban participants possessed university-level qualifications or higher, while the majority of rural participants had completed vocational or college education. In terms of marital status, divorce was more common among urban participants than among their rural counterparts. Living arrangements exhibited a contrasting pattern: retired older adults in urban areas tended to live independently from their children, whereas co-residence with children was more prevalent among rural participants. Considerable differences were also observed in digital engagement. While nearly all urban participants reported using social media platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube, social media use was considerably less common among rural participants. Regarding pre-retirement employment, most respondents had worked in the public sector.

IV. RESULTS

4.1. Health and the Ability to Maintain Daily Activities as the Foundation of Well-Being in Old Age

The findings indicate that, for most retired older adults participating in the study, health is regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for a happy life after retirement. However, what older people emphasize is not merely the absence of illness, but more importantly the ability to maintain independence in everyday life, take care of themselves, and continue engaging in activities that are meaningful to their families and communities.

At this age, I do not ask for much. As long as I am still healthy, can move around by myself, and take care of myself, I feel content. If I were bedridden and had to rely on my children and grandchildren, I would feel miserable and would also burden them.

(P05, male, 72 years old, urban area).

If you are healthy, you can still do morning exercises, go to the market, attend meetings of the elderly association, and socialize with others. On days when I am sick and have to stay at home all day, I feel sad and bored.

(P14, female, 67 years old, rural area).

These findings suggest that, for Vietnamese older adults, health also carries moral and relational meanings. Within the East Asian cultural context, which emphasizes family responsibility and intergenerational reciprocity, maintaining the ability to care for oneself not only reflects individual capability but also enables older people to preserve their dignity and avoid imposing caregiving burdens on their children and grandchildren. Consequently, happiness in later life is associated not only with “being cared for” but also with the capacity “not to require excessive care from others.” This reflects an important relational dimension of well-being, whereby individuals position themselves within networks of family and social relationships.

In addition, the study reveals a close connection between health and social participation. Older adults who maintain relatively good health are more likely to actively engage in elderly associations, physical exercise clubs, religious activities, or gatherings with friends. These social interactions generate feelings of recognition, belonging, and psychological well-being.

According to Havighurst's Activity Theory (1961), life satisfaction in old age is associated with the maintenance of social roles and continued participation in meaningful activities. In the present study, the findings suggest that health serves as an important resource enabling older adults to sustain everyday activities and social relationships. This implies that the relationship between health and subjective well-being may operate partly through opportunities for continued social participation.

Another noteworthy finding is that many participants demonstrated a tendency to adjust their expectations upon entering old age. Rather than striving for perfect health, they accepted the natural changes associated with aging. Their aspiration was to remain "healthy enough to enjoy life" rather than to be completely free from illness. This adaptive process reflects the dynamic and relative nature of subjective well-being.

These findings indicate that health constitutes not only a biological resource but also a social resource that enables older adults to maintain autonomy, continue performing familiar roles, and remain involved in community life. From this perspective, happiness in old age is not simply a consequence of the absence of disease but is socially constructed through the interrelationship between health, functional capacity, and social connectedness. Successful aging, therefore, is not merely about extending longevity, but also about preserving meaning in life and maintaining a sense of belonging within everyday social relationships.

4.2. Family Relationships and Intergenerational Support as Resources for Enhancing Well-Being

The findings show that the family continues to play a central role in shaping older adults' perceptions of happiness after retirement. For most participants, happiness is not measured by income, assets, or material living standards, but is closely linked to family harmony, the health and well-being of children and grandchildren, and feelings of being cared for and emotionally supported in daily life. In other words, older adults' happiness is situated within networks of intergenerational relationships rather than in isolated individual experiences.

At this age, I do not need much. I only hope that my children are healthy, have stable jobs, that my grandchildren behave well, and that there are no conflicts within the family. That alone makes me happy.

(P16, female, 71 years old, rural area).

Having enough money to live on is sufficient. The most precious thing is that my children still care about me. On weekends, they bring the grandchildren over, and when the whole family gathers together, I feel warmth and happiness.

(P08, male, 68 years old, urban area).

These narratives suggest that older adults' perceptions of happiness are often more altruistic than self-centered. Many participants evaluated their lives not through the satisfaction of personal needs but through the achievements, health, and happiness of their children and grandchildren. This reflects a characteristic feature of societies strongly influenced by Confucian values, where individuals are embedded in family and community relationships rather than conceived as autonomous actors. Within such a context, family cohesion and harmony become important emotional resources that foster peace of mind and life satisfaction in old age.

Analysis of the data further indicates that intergenerational support received by older adults extends beyond economic assistance and is primarily emotional and symbolic in nature. For many participants, seemingly simple gestures such as a phone call, a family meal, or spending time together carried greater emotional value than material support.

My children all have their own work, and I do not want to trouble them. But just hearing them call in the evening to ask whether I have eaten or whether I am healthy already makes me happy.

(P11, female, 73 years old, urban area).

Sometimes my children give me money, but I hardly spend it. What I enjoy most is having the whole family together on weekends, sharing meals and talking with my grandchildren.

(P21, male, 74 years old, rural area).

These accounts indicate that the significance of intergenerational support lies not primarily in its material value, but in the sense of presence, care, and continued belonging within the family. As emphasized by Bengtson (2001), multigenerational family bonds remain increasingly important in later life. Consistent with the broader intergenerational solidarity framework developed by Bengtson and colleagues, emotional closeness and frequent

interaction between generations represent important dimensions of family relationships that contribute to older adults' well-being. The findings suggest that these dimensions continue to play a crucial role in sustaining the well-being of older adults in Vietnam.

Another noteworthy finding is that older adults are not merely recipients of support but remain active agents within family networks. Many participants reported continuing to care for grandchildren, assist with household chores, and provide advice to their children regarding various life matters. Maintaining these familiar roles enables them to preserve feelings of usefulness and respect.

Whenever my grandchildren are not around, I miss them. As long as I am healthy, I can take them to school and cook for the family. Knowing that I can still contribute makes me happy.

(P18, female, 67 years old, rural area).

This finding suggests that intergenerational relationships among older adults are not characterized by a one-way pattern of "receiving care" but rather by reciprocity. Older adults are simultaneously recipients and providers of care, experience, emotional support, and practical assistance for younger generations. Such reciprocal exchanges contribute to sustaining meaning in life and enhancing subjective well-being. This observation is broadly consistent with the work of Silverstein and Bengtson (1997), which highlights the reciprocal and multidimensional nature of parent-adult child relationships and their importance for maintaining intergenerational solidarity.

Nevertheless, the data also reflect substantial changes in contemporary Vietnamese family structures. Urbanization, labor migration, and the increasing prevalence of nuclear families have reduced the frequency of face-to-face interactions between older adults and their children and grandchildren. Some participants indicated that they have had to adapt to living apart from their children and accept new forms of connection through smartphones and social media.

All my children work in southern Vietnam. They only come home a few times a year. We video call every day, so I still feel close to them, but sometimes I miss my children and grandchildren very much.

(P24, male, 76 years old, rural area).

In this context, digital technology has partly compensated for the physical absence of family members. Although online communication cannot fully replace face-to-face interaction, it contributes to maintaining emotional connectedness and alleviating loneliness among older adults. These findings suggest that intergenerational relationships are adapting to the transformations of modern society rather than deteriorating entirely, as some pessimistic perspectives have assumed.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the happiness of retired older adults in Vietnam is profoundly relational in nature. Family relationships provide not only material resources but, more importantly, generate feelings of love, care, and continued significance within family life. In the Vietnamese cultural context, where values of kinship, filial piety, and intergenerational responsibility remain influential, the family continues to constitute the most important institution in fostering security, life satisfaction, and happiness in old age. At the same time, transformations in contemporary family structures suggest that older adults' happiness is not a fixed state but rather the outcome of a continuous process of adaptation to changing patterns and forms of family connectedness.

4.3. Social Connectedness and the Sense of Belonging to the Community

In addition to family relationships, the findings indicate that ties with neighbors, friends, associations, and local communities play an important role in maintaining positive psychological well-being among older adults. For many participants, happiness derives not only from the care and attention of children and grandchildren, but also from the sense of remaining embedded within social networks, being able to communicate, share experiences, and continue engaging in familiar activities within community life.

Whenever I miss a day of doing morning exercises with the women in the neighborhood, I feel restless. We do not just exercise there; we chat, ask about one another, and enjoy ourselves.

(P19, female, 69 years old, rural area).

Retirement would be depressing if I stayed at home all day. I still play chess with old friends and go for coffee on weekends. Having people to talk to makes me feel that I am still young.

(P07, male, 72 years old, urban area).

These accounts suggest that the significance of social activities lies not merely in the activities themselves, but in the social interactions generated through them. Everyday encounters, ordinary conversations, and the feeling of being cared for by others all contribute to a sense of familiarity and sustained connection with the social world. For many older adults, continued participation in community spaces signifies the maintenance of their social presence after leaving occupational roles.

Data analysis further reveals that one of the experiences most feared by older adults is not aging or illness, but loneliness and social isolation. Several participants reported feelings of emptiness following retirement due to the loss of occupational relationships and changes in daily routines.

When I first retired, I woke up every morning not knowing what to do. I no longer went to work or met colleagues every day, so I felt a great sense of emptiness. Later, after joining the Veterans' Association and a poetry club, I felt much better mentally.

(P04, male, 70 years old, urban area).

This case illustrates that retirement represents not only the end of employment but also a significant transformation of social networks. Participation in associations and community activities becomes a mechanism through which older adults reconstruct their social lives, thereby maintaining a sense of usefulness and minimizing social isolation.

From the perspective of Activity Theory, life satisfaction in old age is maintained through the replacement of lost social roles with new roles that are appropriate to current living circumstances. The findings suggest that organizations such as the Elderly Association, the Veterans' Association, physical exercise clubs, religious groups, and hobby-based organizations provide important spaces that enable older adults to maintain social participation and preserve a sense of meaning in life.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the differences between rural and urban areas regarding experiences of community connectedness. Older adults in rural areas tend to maintain dense social networks involving neighbors, relatives, and local organizations. Daily interactions occur frequently through community events, weddings, death anniversaries, festivals, and various collective activities.

In the countryside, neighbors are always there for each other. Whenever something happens, everyone comes to ask and offer help. If I do not go out and chat with my neighbors for a day, I start to miss them.

(P22, female, 74 years old, rural area).

By contrast, many urban older adults described a decline in traditional forms of community interaction. *I have lived in this apartment building for years, yet I still do not know many of my neighbors. Everyone keeps to themselves behind closed doors. Modern life may be more convenient, but it also feels colder than in the past.*

(P10, male, 73 years old, urban area).

These findings suggest that urbanization not only transforms residential spaces but also reshapes the structure of social networks. Whereas older adults in rural areas mainly rely on traditional community ties characterized by bonding social capital, urban older adults tend to depend more heavily on family relationships and voluntary networks formed through clubs and shared-interest groups.

Besides face-to-face interactions, the study also highlights the increasingly important role of digital technologies in maintaining older adults' social relationships. Many participants reported using Zalo, Facebook, or video calls to stay connected with friends and relatives.

Our high school friends' group has nearly thirty members. Every day we send messages to ask how everyone is doing on Zalo. Even if we cannot meet in person, I still feel happy because I know everyone is healthy.

(P13, female, 66 years old, urban area).

These findings suggest that advances in information technology have created new forms of social capital that expand opportunities for interaction and partially alleviate feelings of loneliness among older adults. Online

spaces do not completely replace traditional relationships, but they contribute to maintaining the continuity of social networks in a context where many relationships have become geographically dispersed due to urbanization and migration.

From the perspective of Putnam's (2000) social capital theory, community ties and social participation generate important resources that enable older adults to maintain feelings of belonging and social recognition. Everyday interactions provide not only emotional support but also foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of community. In other words, social connectedness is not merely a means of reducing loneliness but also a mechanism through which older adults sustain their social identities and preserve meaning in life after retirement.

Overall, the findings suggest that the happiness of older adults is not constructed in isolation but is deeply embedded within the social networks in which they participate. If the family constitutes a fundamental source of emotional support, then the wider community and broader social relationships provide a sense of belonging and continued presence within social life. This demonstrates that happiness in old age is a relational form of well-being, constituted through the ongoing interactions between individuals and the social institutions and communities surrounding them.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the subjective well-being of retired older adults in Vietnam is shaped through the interaction among health, family relationships, and social connectedness. Rather than existing merely as an individual psychological state, happiness in later life is socially constructed within specific relational contexts and is closely linked to the ability to maintain meaningful roles in everyday life. These findings are consistent with the relational well-being approach, which argues that well-being is not solely a matter of satisfying individual needs but is also constituted by the quality of social relationships and participation in community life (White, 2010; Atkinson, 2013).

First, the study demonstrates that health functions as a fundamental resource for well-being, although its influence on happiness is not direct. For older adults, what matters most is not the complete absence of illness but rather the ability to maintain autonomy, continue engaging in daily activities, and avoid becoming a burden on family members. This finding is consistent with the World Health Organization's concept of healthy ageing (WHO, 2015), which defines quality of life in old age primarily in terms of maintaining functional ability rather than merely preserving biological health.

The findings also reinforce Havighurst's (1961) Activity Theory, which posits that life satisfaction in old age depends upon the maintenance of social roles and continued participation in meaningful activities. However, the results further suggest that the impact of health on happiness is mediated by the capacity for social participation. Health, therefore, is not an end in itself but rather a condition that enables older adults to sustain social presence and preserve meaning in life. In this sense, the findings complement Rowe and Kahn's (1997) framework of successful ageing, which emphasizes low probability of disease, high physical and cognitive functioning, and active engagement with life. Unlike a strictly biomedical interpretation, the present findings suggest that successful ageing may also involve adaptation to age-related changes and the maintenance of meaning in everyday life. In contrast, many participants in the present study accepted the inevitable physical decline associated with ageing and aspired instead to remain "healthy enough to enjoy life." This suggests that successful ageing does not necessarily imply the preservation of ideal health but rather the capacity to adapt to bodily changes and continue finding meaning in life.

Second, the findings confirm the central role of family and intergenerational relationships in the construction of well-being among older adults. Most participants evaluated their happiness not in terms of income or material living standards but through family harmony, the health and well-being of children and grandchildren, and feelings of being cared for and emotionally supported. These findings are consistent with studies conducted in East Asian societies, where individual well-being is often closely tied to the well-being of other family members rather than to personal achievements.

Nevertheless, the study also reflects transformations in Vietnamese family structures under the influence of urbanization and labor migration. As adult children increasingly reside far from their parents, direct forms of support have gradually been supplemented by remote interactions through smartphones and social media. This suggests that intergenerational relationships have not simply deteriorated but are adapting to the changing conditions of contemporary society.

Third, the findings indicate that social connectedness and a sense of community belonging constitute important resources that help older adults maintain positive psychological well-being after retirement. Relationships with friends, neighbors, associations, and community organizations not only alleviate feelings of loneliness but also generate a sense of recognition and continued social presence. These findings are broadly consistent with Putnam's (2000) perspective on social capital, which emphasizes the importance of social networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity. In the present study, such relationships appear to provide emotional and symbolic resources that contribute to subjective well-being among retired older adults.

At the same time, the study reveals substantial differences between rural and urban contexts. Whereas older adults in rural areas continue to maintain dense community networks, those in urban areas are more vulnerable to social isolation due to the decline of traditional forms of community interaction. These findings suggest that urbanization affects not only residential environments but also the structure of older adults' social capital. Meanwhile, the expansion of digital technologies has given rise to new forms of social capital, enabling older adults to sustain social relationships beyond geographical boundaries. This development points to the possibility of extending the concept of social capital to include online interaction networks in studies of ageing.

Overall, the findings suggest that the subjective well-being of retired older adults in Vietnam is fundamentally relational in nature. Health, family, and social connectedness do not operate as isolated factors but interact closely in shaping happiness in later life. Health facilitates continued social participation; family relationships provide emotional resources and meaning in life; and community involvement enables older adults to maintain a sense of belonging and social recognition. These findings suggest that research on older adults' well-being should move beyond a narrow focus on material indicators or individual health status and instead situate well-being within broader social relationships and specific cultural contexts. In doing so, this study contributes empirical evidence supporting the relational well-being approach in research on ageing in Vietnam and underscores the importance of social resources in enhancing quality of life in the context of contemporary population ageing.

VI. CONCLUSION

The qualitative findings indicate that the subjective well-being of retired older adults is constructed through the interaction among health, family relationships and social connectedness. Health is understood not merely as the absence of disease but also as the ability to maintain autonomy and continue engaging in everyday activities. Family and intergenerational relationships serve as important emotional resources, while participation in social and community networks enables older adults to sustain a sense of belonging and social recognition.

The findings suggest that the happiness of retired older adults in Vietnam is fundamentally relational in nature, whereby social resources and the quality of interpersonal relationships are as important as material conditions and individual health. In this regard, the study contributes empirical evidence to the growing body of research on subjective well-being and ageing in the context of population ageing in Vietnam. It also highlights the importance of approaching older adults' quality of life from a relational perspective that takes into account specific socio-cultural contexts.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. Given the qualitative nature of the study and the relatively limited sample size, the findings cannot be considered representative of the entire population of retired older adults in Vietnam. Furthermore, the analysis focused primarily on three dimensions, health, family relationships, and social connectedness and did not examine in depth the roles of other factors such as economic conditions, religion, living environments, or digital technologies. Future studies employing mixed-

method approaches and extending the scope of investigation to older adults from diverse socio-economic backgrounds would help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which well-being is constructed in later life amid contemporary social transformations and population ageing.

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