

Middle-Aged Resiliency & Resistance Study (MARRS): A Qualitative Study of the Influence of Ageism and Age-Inclusivity on the Midlife Years

Donna I. Dumitrescu, Kayla Brodersen, Natasha L. Gallant, & Abigail Wickson-Griffiths

Correspondence: Donna.Dumitrescu@uregina.ca

Background:

- Midlife has been largely overlooked in the literature on lifespan development (Lachman, 2015).
- Limited literature is mostly focused on the undesirable aspects of midlife (e.g., midlife crises (Wethington, 2000), empty nest syndromes, menopausal transition) and excludes the recognition of desirable aspects that may provide a more complete picture of the middle years (Infurna et al., 2020).

Research question:

- How do middle-aged Saskatchewan residents experience the midlife?

Methods:

- Recruitment of 17 participants aged 45-64 years in Saskatchewan.
- 60-minute interviews over Zoom or telephone.
- Interview guide created by authors to look at experiences of aging, ageism, and age-inclusivity during the midlife.
- Advisory council formed and engaged with at every stage of project (i.e., grant application, material creation, data collection/analysis).
- Analysis using template thematic analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Demographics (N = 9):

- Age: 45 to 62 years (M = 55 years); Gender: Women (N = 8); Not reported (N = 1); Race: White (N = 8); Not reported (N = 1); Ethnicity: European (N = 4); 33% Non-Indigenous Canadian (N = 3); Indigenous Canadian (N = 1); Not reported (N = 1).; Household income: \$70,000 or above (N = 4); \$59,000 or below (N = 3); Not reported (N = 2)

Conclusion:

- The midlife experience varies from person to person, and includes the dimensions of contentment, adaptation, and challenges in various life areas (e.g., health, career, finances).

Study Limitations & Future Directions:

- Uneven gender split in sample and missing perspective from people of lower socioeconomic status and racial and ethnic identities.
- Future studies may consider reusing the interview guide with a more diverse sample or exploring these constructs quantitatively.
- Moreover, intersectionality of different identities in the context of midlife experiences could be explored with a larger sample.

Results:

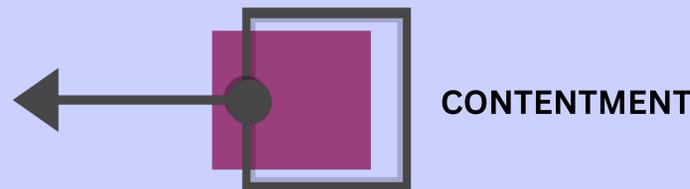
"I haven't really advanced in my career, but for myself, I found that I feel my life purpose was a balanced lifestyle."

"You know, it's good. It's like any age? It has its good things. It has its bad things. There's up, there's downs. It is what you make it."

"What I've experienced is that you don't realize you have to change until you're already pretty far behind."

"I think there's a confidence that comes with midlife. In a sense, it's a good place to be. You are not naive so as to think, like when you're in your teens and twenties that, you know it at all. You've lived through a lot of it. And I think you have a good sense of yourself and what you like and what you want."

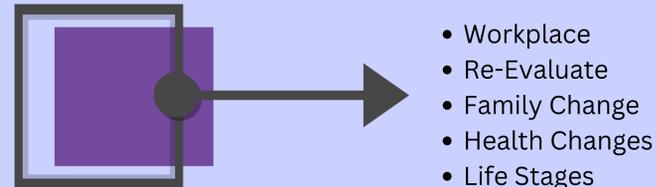
- Financial
- Leisure
- Career
- Self-Confidence
- Friendships
- Family
- Health



"So it is, I don't want to say shocking, but you get some quick reminders on, geez, I can't do this [physical work] the same... So, it was a shock and stark reality to me about, geez, I'm having trouble with the physical part."

"Generally, you are established in your career. Your kids are a little bit older, a little bit more independent. You have some financial security."

ADAPT

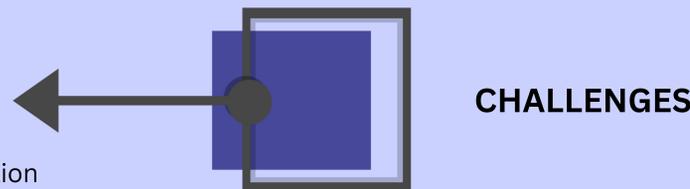


- Workplace
- Re-Evaluate
- Family Change
- Health Changes
- Life Stages

"You're so accustomed to doing things in a certain way or seeing things in a certain way, or even viewing yourself in a certain role or certain way. And then, boom, there's a change that you kind of knew was coming, but you didn't really prepare for it, because why would you."

"My friends are... I consider them very wealthy, not even middle class, you know...They know that I'm struggling and trying to find a job. They know I got my degree, but I don't tell them I go to the food bank. I feel embarrassed by the fact that my level of poverty is so low. And I just feel like I am somebody who's really smart and I have so much to contribute and I kind of feel like my life is being wasted."

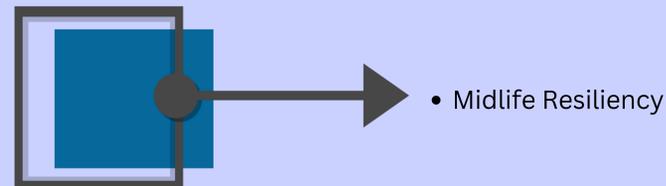
- Hypothesized
- Family
- Financial
- Return to Education



"Even my exercise regime has to be altered as I age. So, I think back on my fitness level and midlife and how it's evolved from running marathons when I was 40 to, well, now I got to learn to swim because my knees hurt too much."

"I can add that, from what I observe, I see a loss in independence, depending on what's happening in the person's life. I see health issues."

RESILIENCY



- Midlife Resiliency

"I believe midlife is unique in that you're in that place in your life where you can see back and you could see forward and you can evaluate and you can plan and you could make changes based on the experiences that you've had."

"I pulled my pension. I went back and I invested all that time to get that degree. And even though I'm proud of that accomplishment, cause it wasn't easy going back when you're mature, "

"It's been very, very difficult. Sorry. I just get emotional when I talk about this. My mom and dad are both passed away. I have no support from anyone because I'm a single individual."

"So, putting my energies into different areas now helps me to be resilient because, although I feel a loss in one area, I can now transfer the energy I put into those [areas] into some other areas, other people, other things."



Middle-Aged Resiliency and Resistance Study

