

Older people are happier in Brazil and South Africa

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Contrary to belief, older people in South Africa and Brazil become happier as they age. New research suggests that, with the right policies in place, a developing country can significantly improve the wellbeing of its older citizens.

The average levels of [wellbeing](#) experienced by older people in South Africa and Brazil improved between 2002 and 2008, due to a combination of [economic growth](#) and enlightened social policies, according to a study from the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, a unique collaboration between five UK Research Councils.

"Our work contradicts many of the [assumptions](#) people have about the fate of older people in [developing countries](#)," said Professor Armando Barrientos, Research Director at Manchester University's Brooks World Poverty Institute. "It's often assumed that people will become poorer and increasingly unhappy with life as they become old, but in South Africa and Brazil the opposite seems to have happened," he said.

The research explored the factors that influence wellbeing among the elderly populations of the two countries. Brazil and South Africa were chosen because of their far-reaching social policies. "They are leading countries in their respective regions, with innovative social policies addressing poverty and [vulnerability](#), such as child and disability benefits, low interest loans for the elderly and non-contributory pension schemes," explained Professor Barrientos.

This large study included a survey of around 1000 [households](#). When the new data was compared with data collected in 2002, it suggested wellbeing had improved and that the majority of older people in the two countries felt satisfied or very satisfied with their lives. A majority of older people in each country also said they were satisfied with their relationships with other family members and with the respect they received from others.

The improvement in wellbeing was strongly influenced by [economic performance](#) and labour market conditions, but social policy also played a significant role. For low-income families, the pension income received by elderly people was essential to both their objective standard of living and their feeling that that life was getting better.

"The research has important lessons for policymakers in the developing world", says Professor Barrientos. "Populations in the developing world are growing much faster than they did in the countries that we now consider as developed" he said. "That means governments in these nations have far less time to deal with the challenge of an ageing population, and they cannot just copy the policies used in developed countries."

There are lessons for the developed world too, he believes. "Many countries in the developed world have been moving towards the idea that the state should provide only a minimal pension", he said. "But our research suggests governments might want to think more carefully about the wider social value of decent state pension provision."

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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