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INVESTIGATING SOCIAL SUPPORT, HEALTH AND GENDER AS DETERMINANTS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR 55–70 YEAR OLD ADULTS

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Health Psychology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Our global populations have low physical activity levels, which are leading to burgeoning health issues. International literature portrays New Zealand as an active nation in comparison to other western nations, yet physical activity levels are declining worldwide, as well as in New Zealand. Approximately 47% of New Zealand males and 43% of New Zealand females aged from 55 to 70 years are not active enough. This study utilized an ecologically based model to investigate gender, social support, physical and mental health, in relation to levels of physical activity. The 6,413 participants were part of a nationwide cross-sectional study and the analyses conducted included bivariate, mediating and moderating relationships. All the proposed hypotheses were supported, except for the moderation hypothesis. Therefore the results of this study, which is the first in New Zealand to consider these relationships, highlights the importance of social support and health when examining physical activity participation. Further research in New Zealand is now required to identify those determinants that explain even more variance in physical activity, with a view to developing effective interventions.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements......................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ................................................................................................................... viii
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. ix
Appendix One .................................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Overview ..................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 5

2.1 Physical Activity in New Zealand ........................................................................... 5

2.2 Physical Activity and Other Nations ........................................................................ 7

2.3 Benefits ..................................................................................................................... 8

2.4 Risks .......................................................................................................................... 12

2.5 Barriers and Motivator ............................................................................................ 14

2.6 Population of Interest .............................................................................................. 17

Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL MODELS

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 19

3.1 Methodology ............................................................................................................. 19

3.1.1 Social Cognitive Theory ..................................................................................... 20

3.1.2 Health Belief Model ............................................................................................ 21
CHAPTER SIX: METHODS

Introduction ................................................................................. 51
6.1 Study Design ........................................................................... 51
6.2 Participants ............................................................................. 51
6.3 Measures ................................................................................ 52
6.4 Control Variables ..................................................................... 55
6.5 Procedures .............................................................................. 57
6.6 Statistical Analysis .................................................................. 58

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESULTS

Introduction .................................................................................. 61
7.1 Data Management .................................................................... 61
7.2 Descriptive Statistics ............................................................... 62
7.3 Hypotheses Tests and Results ................................................... 68
  7.3.1 Hypothesis 1 ..................................................................... 68
  7.3.2 Hypothesis 2 ..................................................................... 68
  7.3.3 Hypothesis 3 ..................................................................... 70
  7.3.4 Hypothesis 4 ..................................................................... 70
  7.3.5 Hypothesis 5 ..................................................................... 80
  7.3.6 Hypothesis 6 ..................................................................... 89

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

Introduction .................................................................................. 92
8.1 Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 ............................................................. 93
8.2 Hypotheses 4a and 4b................................................................. 97
8.3 Hypotheses 5a and 5b................................................................. 97
8.4 Gender .............................................................................. 98
8.5 Hypothesis 6........................................................................ 102
8.6 Limitations .......................................................................... 103
8.7 Implications for Further Research in New Zealand.............. 106
8.8 Conclusion ........................................................................... 108

REFERENCES ............................................................................. 109

APPENDIX ................................................................................... 134
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Response Rates and Missing Data for Variables</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Demographic Information on Participants</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Significant Pearson’s r Correlation Coefficients for all Variables</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Results of Mediation Test using Three Hierarchical Regression Equations: Social Support Regressed on Physical Health, Physical Activity Regressed on Social Support and Physical Activity Regressed on Physical Health Then Mediated by Social Support</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Results of Mediation Test using Three Hierarchical Regression Equations: Social Support Regressed on Mental Health, Physical Activity Regressed on Social Support and Physical Activity Regressed on Mental Health Then Mediated by Social Support</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Results of Mediation Test using Three Hierarchical Regression Equations: Physical Health Regressed on Social Support, Physical Activity Regressed on Physical Health, Physical Activity Regressed on Social Support Then Mediated by Physical Health</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Results of Mediation Test using Three Hierarchical Regression Equations: Mental Health regressed on Social Support, Physical activity regressed on Mental Health and Physical Activity Regressed on Social Support Then Mediated by Mental Health</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Results of Moderation Test using Hierarchical Regression Equations: Physical Activity Regressed on Gender and Social Support, and Physical Activity Regressed on the Interaction Variable GenderxSocial Support</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The social support and physical activity relationship.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The social support and health relationship.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The health and physical activity relationship.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social support mediates the health and physical activity relationship.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Health mediates the social support and health relationship.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gender moderates the social support and physical activity relationship.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Multiple regressions testing mediation of physical health and physical activity by social support.</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Multiple regressions testing mediation of mental health and physical activity social support.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Multiple regressions testing mediation of social support and physical activity by physical health.</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Multiple regressions testing mediation of social support and physical mental health.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

1 Questionnaire 134