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Loneliness among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand

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Abstract

Introduction

Loneliness is a major problem experienced by older people living in long term care settings. Among older people, loneliness has been associated with poorer physical and mental health. However, there is limited information known about the prevalence of loneliness and socio-demographic and health characteristics associated with loneliness, among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand.

Methodology

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design to explore the degree of loneliness among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand and the socio-demographic and health characteristics associated with loneliness. Methods included a demographic data sheet, the Barthel Index to measure functional independence, the EQ-5D-5L and EQ-VAS to measure health and wellbeing, the geriatric depression scale to measure depression, and the De-Jong Gierveld loneliness scale to measure loneliness. Between December 2015 and April 2016, data from 36 participants were collected using predominantly face to face interviews.

Results

The mean age of participants was 81 years (95% CI: 77.81-84.42). Analysis revealed older people experienced marginal loneliness (M = 2.36, 95% CI: 1.76-2.96). Logistic regression predicted loneliness was almost twice as likely to occur in older people with low perceived health (OR = 1.78, p = .04) and was more than twice as likely to occur in those with fewer social networks (OR = 2.53, p = .03). Logistic regression also predicted that those with fewer social networks were three times more likely to experience social loneliness (OR = 3.18, p < .00).
Conclusion

Loneliness is prevalent among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand and is associated with lower levels of perceived health and fewer social networks. Further research with a larger population is needed to understand loneliness, the factors associated with it, and more importantly, strategies to reduce it.
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