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The Social World of Older Adults in New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Masters of Arts
in
Psychology

at Massey University, Palmerston North
New Zealand.

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2010
Abstract

The present study examined the impact of socio-demographic factors on the relationship between marital status and social support on the one hand, and marital status and psychological well-being on the other hand among older adults aged 55-70 years old. This study extended the work of Barrett (1999) by expanding social support to include structure and function of social network types, and social engagement (loneliness and social provision). Particular attention was paid to the never married group who were compared to other marital groups. A secondary analysis of the Health, Work, and Retirement (HWR) (2006) cross-sectional data was undertaken. The HWR postal survey included questions about socio-demographics, mental well-being, and social support. Results show that the social network types of Locally Integrated, Locally Self-Contained, Wider Community, Family, and Private differed by socio-demographics and marital status and that age, education, and gender moderated the relationship between scores on Locally Self-Contained and Locally Integrated networks and marital status. Singles reported they were lonelier than the married group and less lonely than the previously married group. Reported levels of social provision for singles were the lowest compared to other marital status groups. Gender was not found to moderate the relationship between marital status and social provision. In the analyses of psychological well-being, the single group scored lower than the married group and higher than the previously married group, a similar finding to Barrett (1999). Additionally, positive subjective well-being was found to be associated with socio-demographic factors. Moreover, low levels of loneliness, positive perceptions of social support, and high scores on the Locally Integrated, Locally Self-Contained, and the Wider Community network types were associated with positive subjective well-being. Socio-demographics failed to moderate the relationship between marital status and subjective well-being. Limitations of the study and implications for future research are discussed with an emphasis on future longitudinal data analysis.
Dedication

To mum, Nora, for believing in me even when I doubted my ability to complete this project. Thank you for the emotional support and encouragement your long distance phone calls provided. Without your love, this would not have been possible.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge those individuals who have supported me through this my journey of this Masters thesis. To begin with, I would like to acknowledge Dr Fiona Alpass, my academic supervisor, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you for your expert advice, support, encouragement, and patience, which are greatly appreciated.

Special thanks to my friend and writing muse, Tessa Brudevold-Iversen, who sustained me through the different stages of the writing process. You have been an inspiration.

To my family, David, Nora, Bassem, and Wael for your encouragement, support, and most importantly your patience with this long process.
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