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# **The Life and Ageing Experiences of Gay Men Over the Age of 65 in New Zealand**

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degree of

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in

Nursing

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **BACKGROUND**

What does it mean to age as a gay man in New Zealand? Until recently, this has been a question difficult to answer as there were no studies completed in New Zealand regarding this topic and thus, this principal work explores this question.

### **AIMS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the life and ageing experiences of gay men in New Zealand over the age of 65 years. Its three aims were to:

- Critically explore the narratives of gay men over 65 years.
- Identify areas of support that these men might need as they age, and
- Inform professional health practice about the care needs of older gay men.

### **METHODS**

This enquiry has utilised two theoretical frameworks, narrative gerontology informed by critical gerontology melded together in which to explore the above aims. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews with 12 men from the ages of 65-81 years of age. Analysis of the data were completed by thematic analysis.

### **FINDINGS**

There were two main themes that became evident in this project and these were *emergence of the gay self* and *the ageing experience*.

### **CONCLUSION**

Resilience was a significant factor in how well the men aged even in an environment of homophobia. Being independent and having a strong social support network were factors that assisted them in ageing in the absence of a partner. Other ageing concerns that surfaced that were not sexual orientation specific were dealing with loss, death, financial well-being, and the ageist attitudes of others. The men were wary of sharing their sexual orientation with too many healthcare professionals and they feared having to potentially hide their sexual orientation again if they ever needed to go into a long-term care setting in the future. This study highlights the unique experiences of ageing among older gay men in New Zealand. Healthcare professionals as well as nurse educators and researchers must recognise the unique history of this group of men and any conflicts this group may have with others of different orientation in order to assist them to age well in a safe social environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, to my Mom and Dad, this work is dedicated to you both and to your love and support you have given to me over the years. You cared for me, encouraged me to go to school and to reach high. You are the parents every child should have. Mom, I wish you were around to see my work come to fruition. I miss you.

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## FOREWARD

*The following poem was kindly given to me by one of my participants. This 75 year old man shared his story with such an open heart that not only did we share cups of tea and biscuits, but also tears. Thank you sir for your story and your contribution to this study.*

I break the news to those so close, and whom I love,  
my heart hurts and breaks, for more days than in a month.  
I struggle, seek counselling (again) there's anger, shame and bitterness,  
all this has to end as being worthwhile !  
Separation from my wife?! , pain, grieving, yes many more tears,  
Will there ....Be peace of mind, after parting...  
.....from where I sit.

It's time to par, my thanks to those who've given us support,  
family, and friends, they're with us now, with emotion fraught.  
Our lives, like a book, one chapter ending, and a new one begins.  
Yes, the characters are the same, but different.  
And yet still to be intertwined, through family and friends,  
But separate...  
.....from where I sit.

Now separately, this growth, of doing, caring and living, will continue.  
There will always be those memories of the good times, for me and you.  
So often, I have asked, "what of my faith and my beliefs?"  
Where is **my** God in all of this ?  
I can only say..."for the first time in my life, I...can...talk...to...God !  
And feel OK about myself. But oh, at what cost!"  
Oh yes, God has helped me through....  
.....to where I now sit.

You see, it is very much a matter of acknowledging **who** I am,  
it is **not** a decision **to be** gay.  
Who would go through all that struggle, trauma, agony, tears and yes-possible rejection?  
Just to be able to say "I'm gay!"  
I believe that I've been gay from the beginning of my life.  
**Now, yes and only now** I am at peace with God my Creator,  
and yes I'm proud to be a Gay Christian...  
.....no matter where I sit!

By: Jasper (*pseudonym*)  
December 1994  
Coming out at the age of 59