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ASSESSING COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN OLDER ADULTS AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO QUALITY OF LIFE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate

in

Clinical Psychology

at Massey University, Wellington,

New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive impairment of any magnitude carries an undetermined societal and individual cost. The desire to accurately predict cognitive decline at an early stage is sought-after as robust cognitive health and function in later life is desirable. Knowing who is at risk and what those risks may be is imperative for targeting interventions to those in need. The lack of nationally representative information regarding cognitive functioning means that there is little information about base rates of cognitive functioning. This represents a problem in terms of gauging the incidence of cognitive impairment and difficulties related to planning for social and health expenditure for the ageing population. This thesis explores the validity and reliability of the Addenbrooke’s Cognitive Examination-Revised and develops New Zealand norms for the measure using data from the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing. These demographically stratified norms will help to determine those people who may be more vulnerable to a dementing process. The information is applied in the context of examining the impact of cognitive functioning on quality of life; an important concept to consider in research.

In article one, a pilot study of the use of the Addenbrooke’s Cognitive Examination-Revised (ACE-R) with older community dwelling adults, the utility of the measure was supported. In article two, the ACE-R was integrated into a nationwide longitudinal study of older adults. Stratified demographic norms were created. This is the first known nationally representative New Zealand study to provide evidence of the impact of age, gender and ethnicity on measures of cognitive functioning. In article three this information was applied in the study of the relationship between cognitive functioning and quality of life. Results suggested that cognitive functioning has a small significant association with quality of life in older age and a much larger association in those who display cognitive functioning difficulties. This research adds to the research base in New Zealand by providing representative norms from which older adults can be compared in a meaningful and specific way.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great excitement that I write this page, as it means that the thesis is ready to submit! This process has not been easy – many late nights, worrying, procrastination… Now that it is all written and done, there is a hope that this research will be beneficial to others in some way to help promote quality in life. There are a number of people I would like to thank who helped me through this process. Thank you to my participants whose willingness to help and openness to share was humbling. To my supervisors, Associate Professor Fiona Alpass and Professor Janet Leatham, your guiding support through this process provided direction, discussion and discourse, thank you. Thanks to the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing, (NZLSA; Massey University and the Family Centre) for allowing me the opportunity to work in this special area and for providing such a rich and varied database to work with. A huge thanks also to my family and friends for their patience, unconditional support and unrelenting questions about when I will be finished which kept me grounded and motivated. Also thanks to some great friends: Lyn, Veena and Lucia, for the distracting conversations that added humour and enrichment to many years of study. To those at Harakeke Club, (Presbyterian Support Elder Care) thank-you; introducing and encouraging my interest in working with older adults helped me to become the person I am today.

Contribution of author to project

The author was responsible for most aspects of this research, including the formulation of research questions and data collection for the pilot study (Article 1), data analysis, interpretation and write up of the papers (Article 2 and 3). Data for Article 2 and 3 was collected and collated by the NZLSA research team, principle investigators – Associate Professor Fiona Alpass, Professor Christine Stephens, Mr Charles Waldegrave and Dr Peter King.
Candidate’s Declaration

I, Lauren Callow, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology at Massey University Wellington, do hereby certify that:

1. The papers and thesis contained herein comprise entirely my original work towards the degree,

2. This work has not been submitted to any other university or institution for a higher degree,

3. The thesis including papers is less than 65,000 words in length, excluding tables, references and appendices,

4. Ethics approval for the research was obtained by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 10/23.

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Lauren Callow
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