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Needs, Social Support and Psychological Well-Being in the Older Person

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the requirements for the degree of
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at Massey University.

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was twofold. First, to investigate the relationships between functional ability, received social support and psychological well-being. Second, to determine whether formal tangible support was more effective than informal tangible support in reducing the deleterious effects of functional ability difficulties on the psychological well-being of older adults. Subjects were 89 older adults (aged 64 to 90 years) who were recruited from the A2 Service Coordination Database of the MidCentral Health Crown Health Enterprise. They were interviewed in their homes. The questionnaire was comprised of four sets of questions containing measures of functional ability, informal and formal tangible support received to help with functional ability difficulties, received general social support with three subscales (tangible support, emotional support and informational support) and psychological well-being. The results partially upheld the prediction that difficulties with functional ability would be related to lower psychological well-being; instrumental activities of daily living were related to lower psychological well-being, although this was not the case with activities of daily living. Social support was not found to be associated with psychological well-being with one exception; in the opposite direction to the hypothesis, higher levels of informal received needs-aligned tangible support were related to better psychological well-being. The results failed to confirm that formal or informal support buffered the negative impact that functional ability difficulties have on psychological well-being. Functional ability difficulties were associated with higher levels of all the forms of received social support except for informational support. The findings indicate that the problems with functional ability caused by chronic illness could be linked to lower psychological well-being in older adults. Tangible support from informal sources may be associated with better psychological well-being. The theoretical and methodological implications of the findings are discussed. It is suggested that future research investigate older adults attitudes towards receiving support from the different sources available to them.

This is dedicated to the memory of my Dad
Gordon Nixon
31/1/27 to 4/8/79.

It is also dedicated to my subjects
whom I carry around in my heart,
some who have already joined Dad.

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