

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Exploring the Protective Role of Perceived Social Support on Physical Health in the Retirement
Transition

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

Masters of Science

In

Psychology

At Massey University, Palmerston North

New Zealand

Claire Rayner

2013

Abstract

New Zealand has an ageing population which will pose a number of economic challenges as the population structure changes. This has prompted a need to find ways to help people age healthily and successfully into later life to reduce the costs associated with poor health and dependence. The transition to retirement is focused on in this study as a key period of time when numerous contextual factors undergo change and adjustment that may impact on later health outcomes. One change in the retirement transition is often the reorganisation of social relationships, and in accord with previous research it was hypothesised that perceptions of available social support would play a protective role on physical health for middle-to-older age adults as they make the transition from paid employment to retirement. This longitudinal study used data obtained from the 2006, 2008 and 2010 waves of the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Study. The participants were a representative sample of middle to older age New Zealanders who provided responses to a postal survey in each wave of data collection (N = 1834). Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to explore the relationship between retirement, social support, social network type and health outcomes. Regression analysis revealed that retirees experience slightly poorer health than workers and that this relationship cannot be accounted for by age or health status prior to retirement. Contrary to predictions, social support prior to retirement and changes in social support during the retirement transition did not explain this relationship. Further to this, social support only had a weak and unstable impact on health regardless of employment status. However, when examining the different types of social support, Social Integration was found to be important to health. Social Integration had a small positive direct effect on health for both retirees and workers, but particularly so for retirees as demonstrated by a significant interaction. Further investigation of the impact of Social Integration on health during the transition to retirement is suggested as a useful direction for future research.

Acknowledgements

First, thank you to my supervisor Chris Stephens who has been a patient and encouraging guide throughout the whole thesis process. I stalled a number of times and you knew just what to say to keep me moving forward.

Thank you to Brendan Stevenson for so patiently answering my endless emails as I worked through the challenging method and data analysis sections of this thesis.

To my parents in-law Garry and Elaine, thank you for being so kind and generous in letting me study in an office at your workplace for a whole year.

To my mum Paula, and my dad Mike, thank you for always taking an interest in what I do and supporting and encouraging me in my education. Thank you also for gifting me my beloved laptop so I could work on my thesis anywhere.

And finally, to my husband Terry, thank you so much for being unfailingly supportive and encouraging and cheering me on throughout the six years I have been studying. I would never have got this far without you and the joy you bring to my life.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures and Tables	vi
 Chapter 1: Introduction: Retirement and Physical Health.....	 1
1.1. Retirement	1
1.2. Retirement and Health Outcomes.....	2
1.3. Heterogeneity of Health Outcomes in Retirement	4
1.4. Summary	5
 Chapter 2: Social Support.....	 7
2.1. Definition of Social Support	7
2.2. Definition of Structural and Functional Support.....	7
2.3. Relationship Between Structural and Functional Support	7
2.4. Definition of Perceived and Received Support.....	8
2.5. Conceptual Differences Between Perceived and Received Support	9
2.6. Multidimensional Models of Functional Support	10
 Chapter 3: Social Support and Physical Health.....	 14
3.1. Social Relationships and Impact on Health	14
3.2. General Health Status	15
3.3. Impact of Social Support on General Health in Initially Healthy Individuals	16
3.4. Structural versus Functional Support and Health.....	17
3.5. Perceived versus Received Support and Health.....	18
3.6. Types of Functional Support and Health	19
3.7. Summary	20
 Chapter 4: Retirement and Social Support	 21
4.1. Changes in Social Networks in Retirement	21
4.2. Changes in Functional Support in Retirement	22
4.3. Limitations in Research	23
4.4. Heterogeneity of Changes in Social Networks and Social Support in Retirement	23
4.5. Summary	24
4.6. Justification of Present Study and Research Questions	24
 Chapter 5: Method.....	 27
5.1. Introduction.....	27
5.2. Participants.....	27
5.3. Measures	28
General Health Status	28
Health Change Scores	29
Social Support.....	30
Social Support Change Scores	31

Social Network Type	31
Employment Status	31
Socioeconomic Status	32
Physical Activity	32
Partner Status	32
Expectations of Retirement.....	33
Work Social Support.....	33
Age.....	34
5.4. Procedure	34
5.5. Data Analysis	34
Chapter 6: Results.....	37
6.1. Question 1	37
6.2. Question 2	39
6.3. Question 3	42
6.4. Question 4	43
6.5. Question 5	45
6.6. Question 6	45
6.7. Question 7	47
6.8. Question 8	49
6.9. Question 9	50
6.9.1 Question 10	50
Chapter 7: Discussion	56
7.1.Introduction.....	56
7.1.1. Retirement and Changes in Physical Health	56
7.1.2. Contextual Factors in the Retirement Transition and Health Outcomes.....	57
7.1.3. Social Support and Health Outcomes	58
7.1.4. Changes in Social Network Type and Social Support in the Retirement Transition	58
7.1.5. Moderators of Perceptions of Social Support	59
7.1.6. Social Network Type, Social Support and Changes in Health.....	60
7.1.7. Association Between Changes in Social Support and Changes in Health	60
7.1.8. Moderating Effect of Social Support in the Relationship Between Retirement..... and Health	60
7.1.9. Social Integration and Health Outcomes in Retirement.....	61
7.2. Directions for Future Research	64
7.3. Strengths of the Study	65
7.4. Conclusion	65
References.....	67

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Health and Social Support	1
Table 2. Correlations Between Health Time 1, Health Time 3, Age and Employment Status	2
Table 3. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Health at Time 3	3
Table 4. Correlations Between Health at Time 3 and Theorised Moderators.....	4
Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Moderators of Health at Time 3	5
Table 6. Correlations Between Health Time 1, Health Time 3, Age and Social Support.....	6
Table 7. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Social Support Predicting Health at Time 3	7
Table 8. Correlations Between Social Support Time 3 and Theorised Moderators.....	8
Table 9. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Moderators of Social Support at Time 3	9
Table 10. Correlations Between Health Change Scores, Social Network Type and Social Support.....	10
Table 11. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Changes in Health.....	11
Table 12. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Moderating Effect of Social Support on Health at Time 3	12
Table 13. Correlations Between Health at Time 3 and the Social Provisions Subscales.....	13
Table 14. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Testing Moderating Effect of Social Provisions Subscales on Health at Time 3	14
Table 15. Means and Standard Deviations for Health at Time 3 for Retirees and Non-Retirees at High and Low Social Integration	15

Figures

Figure 1. Social Network Type at Time	16
Figure 2. Social Network Type at Time 3.....	17
Figure 3. Mean Low and High Social Integration Scores for Retirees and Workers.....	18