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The Social World of Older Adults in New Zealand

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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.

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Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Overview.....	1
Description of the Aging Population in New Zealand.....	1
Ethnic Group.....	2
Chapter Two: Social Support and Well-Being.....	4
Background.....	4
Social isolation.....	5
Risk factors for loneliness.....	6
Social networks and social provision.....	7
Link between social support and well-being.....	10
Theoretical Frameworks	14
Research Hypotheses	18
Chapter Three: Method	20
Research Design.....	20
Sample Composition and Response Rate	20
Procedure	20
Measures	21
Demographic information.....	21
Economic living standard.....	22
Social support measures.....	23
Social support network types.....	23
The Social Provisions Scale.....	25
Social isolation.....	25
Well-being.....	25
Chapter Four: Results	27
Missing Data and Variable Transformations	27

Data Analyses	28
Results.....	28
Differences in Network Types	31
Family network type.	32
Locally integrated network type.	34
Wider community network type.	37
Private network type.	39
Locally self-contained network type.....	41
Factors Contributing to Social Integration.....	44
Loneliness.	45
Social provision.	47
Factors Contributing to Well-Being.....	49
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	53
Hypothesis 1: Networks.....	53
Hypothesis 2: Loneliness	59
Hypothesis 3: Social Provision.....	60
Hypothesis 4: Psychological Well-Being	62
Socio-demographics.....	63
Social Support.....	64
General Limitations	66
Implications for Future Research.....	67
Conclusion	68
References.....	70
Appendix A.....	78
Health, Work, and Retirement Survey: March 2006.	78

List of Tables

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Continuous Variables Used in This Study..	29
Table 2. Summary of the Participants Demographic Characteristics	31
Table 3. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Family Network Scores	33
Table 4. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and interaction Effects on Locally Integrated Network Scores	35
Table 5. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Wider Community Network Scores.....	38
Table 6. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Private Network Scores	40
Table 7. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Locally Self-Contained Network Scores	42
Table 8. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Loneliness Scores	46
Table 9. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, and Interaction Effects on Social Provision Scores	48
Table 10. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Socio-Demographics, Marital Status, Social Support and Interaction Effects on Well-Being Scores	51

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Conceptual model of the impact of social support on well-being.....	17
<i>Figure 2.</i> A schematic representation of gender x marital status interaction on scores of Locally Integrated Network type.	36
<i>Figure 3.</i> A schematic representation of the age x marital status interaction on Locally Self-Contained network type scores	43
<i>Figure 4.</i> A schematic representation of the education x marital status interaction on Locally Self-Contained network type scores	44