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**PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT DURING THE
CAREER TRANSITION PROCESS: A STUDY OF
MATURE AGE STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND.**

**A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

Research has been conducted to identify the difficulties which mature students experience as undergraduate students, and to explore the career transition process of this population in the context of these difficulties. The research design involved a two-stage multi-method process which incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to measure the difficulties construct, it was necessary to develop a scale pertinent to New Zealand mature students. This was achieved through modification of an existing Hong Kong scale. A survey was designed in order to administer a range of scales. Pertinent measures were the difficulties scale, the Career Transitions Inventory which measured perception of psychological resources operating during career transition, the participation and commitment scales of the Salience Inventory, and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire. Global measures were used to assess perception of stress and coping in the mature student role. Demographic information was also collected. The research aim was to explore the impact of a range of variables on the four outcome measures of psychological well being, self reported academic performance, stress and coping. The sample group for the qualitative stage of the research consisted of a representative sample of mature undergraduate students from across the four colleges of Massey University, at Albany. For stage two the sample group consisted of 500 mature undergraduate students randomly selected by the administration staff of Massey University, at Albany. Five major areas of difficulty were identified in the undergraduate context. These were home/family concerns, finances, future career concerns, study skills, and support issues. The home/family, finances, and study skills domains of difficulty appeared most pertinent to mature students in this population. Home/family difficulty was associated with health indices, emerging as the strongest predictor of the psychological well being and stress variables. Study skills emerged as the most valuable predictor of the performance and coping variables. Results pointed to the psychological resources of readiness and social support as being most salient for mature students. Readiness emerged as predictive of psychological well being and coping, with social support predictive of performance. This study has both theoretical implications, and implications for career counselling interventions for mature students. Psycho-educational and psychosocial strategies at both the group and individual level are suggested as appropriate interventions.