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Loneliness among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand

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## **Abstract**

### **Introduction**

Loneliness is a major problem experienced by older people living in long term care settings. Among older people, loneliness has been associated with poorer physical and mental health. However, there is limited information known about the prevalence of loneliness and socio-demographic and health characteristics associated with loneliness, among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand.

### **Methodology**

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design to explore the degree of loneliness among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand and the socio-demographic and health characteristics associated with loneliness. Methods included a demographic data sheet, the Barthel Index to measure functional independence, the EQ-5D-5L and EQ-VAS to measure health and wellbeing, the geriatric depression scale to measure depression, and the De-Jong Gierveld loneliness scale to measure loneliness. Between December 2015 and April 2016, data from 36 participants were collected using predominantly face to face interviews.

### **Results**

The mean age of participants was 81 years (95% CI: 77.81-84.42). Analysis revealed older people experienced marginal loneliness ( $M = 2.36$ , 95% CI: 1.76-2.96). Logistic regression predicted loneliness was almost twice as likely to occur in older people with low perceived health ( $OR = 1.78$ ,  $p = .04$ ) and was more than twice as likely to occur in those with fewer social networks ( $OR = 2.53$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Logistic regression also predicted that those with fewer social networks were three times more likely to experience social loneliness ( $OR = 3.18$ ,  $p < .00$ ).

## **Conclusion**

Loneliness is prevalent among older people living in long term care settings in New Zealand and is associated with lower levels of perceived health and fewer social networks. Further research with a larger population is needed to understand loneliness, the factors associated with it, and more importantly, strategies to reduce it.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter one: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. <i>Background and rationale</i>	1
1.2. <i>Usage of terms</i>	2
1.3. <i>Research aims and questions</i>	2
1.4. <i>Overview of the thesis</i>	3
1.5. <i>Chapter summary</i>	3
<b>Chapter two: Literature review</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. <i>Literature search process</i>	5
2.2. <i>Loneliness</i>	6
2.3. <i>Effects of loneliness</i>	7
2.4. <i>Loneliness in older people</i>	9
2.5. <i>Loneliness in long term care</i>	10
2.6. <i>Socio-demographic and health factors associated with loneliness</i>	12
2.6.1. Age	12
2.6.2. Gender	13
2.6.3. Marital status	14

2.6.4.	Social networks	14
2.6.5.	Health and wellbeing	15
2.6.6.	Institutionalisation	15
2.6.7.	Residential satisfaction	16
2.7.	<i>Measuring loneliness</i>	16
2.7.1.	University of California, Los Angeles loneliness scale	16
2.7.2.	De Jong Gierveld loneliness scale	17
2.7.3.	Social provision scale	17
2.8.	<i>Measuring functional independence</i>	17
2.8.1.	The Barthel Index	18
2.8.2.	Functional Independence Measure	18
2.9.	<i>Measuring self-reported health status</i>	18
2.9.1.	36-item short form health survey	18
2.9.2.	EQ-5D-5L	19
2.10.	<i>Measuring depression</i>	19
2.10.1.	Hamilton Rating Scale for depression	20
2.10.2.	Zung self-rating depression scale	20
2.10.3.	Montgomery-Asberg depression rating scale	20
2.10.4.	Geriatric depression scale	20
2.11.	<i>Chapter summary</i>	21
<b>Chapter three: Methodology</b>		<b>22</b>
3.1.	<i>Theoretical framework</i>	22
3.2.	<i>Research design</i>	23

3.3.	<i>Methods</i>	25
3.3.1.	Demographic data	25
3.3.2.	Social networks	25
3.3.3.	Health Scores	26
3.3.3.1.	<i>Functional independence</i>	26
3.3.3.2.	<i>Health and wellbeing</i>	27
3.3.3.2.1.	Perceived health	27
3.3.3.2.2.	Health rating	27
3.3.3.3.	<i>Depression</i>	28
3.3.4.	Loneliness	28
3.4.	<i>Participant selection</i>	29
3.5.	<i>Sample size</i>	31
3.6.	<i>Data collection</i>	32
3.7.	<i>Ethical considerations</i>	33
3.8.	<i>Data analysis</i>	34
3.8.1.	Inferential statistics	34
3.8.1.1.	<i>Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient</i>	35
3.8.1.2.	<i>Spearman rank order</i>	35
3.8.1.3.	<i>The independent sample t-test</i>	36
3.8.1.4.	<i>Mann-Whitney U test</i>	36
3.8.1.5.	<i>A one-way analysis of variance</i>	36
3.8.1.6.	<i>Kruskal-Wallis test</i>	37
3.8.1.7.	<i>Jonckheere–Terpstra test for ordered alternatives</i>	37
3.8.1.8.	<i>Logistic regression</i>	37



3.9.	<i>Transformed variables</i>	38
3.10.	<i>Research rigour</i>	39
3.10.1.	Objectivity	39
3.10.2.	Reliability	39
3.10.3.	Validity	40
3.10.4.	Generalisability	41
3.11.	<i>Chapter summary</i>	42
<b>Chapter four: Results</b>		<b>43</b>
4.1.	<i>Participant demographics</i>	43
4.2.	<i>Health scores</i>	45
4.3.	<i>Demographic factors influencing health scores</i>	45
4.4.	<i>Relationships between health scores</i>	47
4.5.	<i>Loneliness</i>	48
4.6.	<i>Factors associated with loneliness</i>	49
4.7.	<i>Chapter summary</i>	53
<b>Chapter five: Discussion</b>		<b>55</b>
5.1.	<i>Socio-demographic factors</i>	55
5.2.	<i>Health factors</i>	58
5.2.1.	Functional independence	59
5.2.2.	Health and Wellbeing	60
5.2.3.	Depression	60
5.3.	<i>Loneliness</i>	61
5.4.	<i>Chapter Summary</i>	62

<b>Chapter six: Conclusion</b>	<b>64</b>
6.1. <i>Limitations of this study</i>	65
6.2. <i>Future research</i>	67
6.3. <i>Implications of the study</i>	68
6.4. <i>Chapter Summary</i>	69
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>108</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Reliability of scales</i> .....	41
Table 2 <i>Patient demographic data</i> .....	44
Table 3 <i>Relationships between socio-demographic factors and health scores</i> .....	46
Table 4 <i>Correlation between health scores</i> .....	47
Table 5 <i>Correlations between health scores and loneliness</i> .....	48
Table 6 <i>Relationships between loneliness and socio-demographic factors</i> .....	50
Table 7 <i>Logistic regression predicting loneliness</i> .....	51
Table 8 <i>Logistic regression predicting emotional loneliness</i> .....	52
Table 9 <i>Logistic regression predicting social loneliness</i> .....	53

## List of Appendices

<i>Appendix A.</i> Summary of relevant studies.....	71
<i>Appendix B.</i> Questionnaire.....	76
<i>Appendix C.</i> Permission to use EQ-5D-5L and EQ-VAS.....	83
<i>Appendix D.</i> Participant information sheet.....	85
<i>Appendix E.</i> Participant consent form.....	88
<i>Appendix F.</i> Coding sheet.....	89
<i>Appendix G.</i> Massey University Human Ethics Committee approval.....	93
<i>Appendix H.</i> Graduate research fund approval letter.....	94
<i>Appendix I.</i> NZNO grant approval letter.....	95
<i>Appendix J.</i> Consultation email I .....	96
<i>Appendix K.</i> Consultation email II.....	101
<i>Appendix L.</i> Recruitment email to Managers of long term care settings.....	106