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**Satisfaction with Life and Social Comparison
among Older People**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In a rapidly greying world, successful ageing is an important concept and goal. While this remains poorly-defined in the literature, there is wide agreement that satisfaction with life is a major contributor, together with health and functional ability. It has been suggested that the perception of satisfaction with life might be affected by social comparison, but little is known about this relationship, particularly among older people. Consequently, this study investigates the impact of health-related and social comparison variables on the perception of satisfaction with life at various stages of old age.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey of 542 community-dwelling people aged 65+ was conducted to measure health (physical and mental), functional ability, satisfaction with life and social comparison dimensions. Participants were randomly selected from the general electoral role of the Manawatu region of New Zealand. The Short Form-12 Health Survey measured perceived physical and mental health, the Groningen Activity Restriction Scale measured functional ability, the Satisfaction With Life Scale measured life satisfaction and the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure assessed social comparison. Additional demographic information was collected. Age groups (65-74, 75-84, 85+) were compared.

Results: A marked difference was found in satisfaction with life before and after age 85 years, that was not explained by health (physical or mental), functional ability, demographic factors or comparison frequency. The oldest participants (aged 85+) consistently reported the highest levels of satisfaction with life. This same group reported predominantly making downward social comparisons (with those doing worse).

Conclusions: Important links were found between satisfaction with life and downward social comparison. Better understanding of comparison drivers across older age will progress the discussion on what impacts the perceptions of satisfaction with life and contributes to successful ageing.

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