

## Greetings for 2013 from the Health and Ageing Research Team (HART)

Welcome to another year of research on ageing by the Health and Ageing Research Team at Massey University. This is a newsletter for all those who have expressed an interest in our research by signing up to the HART endusers email list. We want to share a taste of our findings and give you some news about our activities.

As our longitudinal study has progressed, we have been funded by different organisations for different specific projects. The first in 2006, was the Health, Work and Retirement Study (HWR) funded by the Health Research Council. The next questionnaires and interviews were funded by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology and in 2010 we joined with the Family Centre to become the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NZLSA). So, the findings we mention in this newsletter come from these first studies (four questionnaires over six years, and several interview studies).

Now, we announce our new project. The new Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has provided funding to ask questions about older people's needs and plans into the future. This will be known as the Independence, Contribution, and Connection study (ICC) and will include all those participants who originally began with the HWR in 2006. The length of time that participants have been providing information makes the latest information that we will gather in 2013, particularly powerful. A new questionnaire will be sent to all HWR participants who agree to keep going, in late 2013. In 2014, we will publish the initial findings on a special website and ask for feedback from all interested older people in New Zealand.

Vicki Beagley is pictured here as she has now joined us as a research officer on the ICC project. Vicki has been working with us on our longitudinal project since 2008, after finishing a master's degree on findings from the 2006 HWR study. Please use our free phone number (0800 100 134) if you have any questions about the study, all other contact details are on the back page.



Thank you very much for your interest in our research on ageing in New Zealand. We hope **you are interested to** read about some of our findings in this newsletter.

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Shortly we will be launching our new logo and website for the Health and Ageing Research Team. You will be sent an email to alert you to these changes. If you are not already subscribed you can join our mailing list. We will send all our members updates by email. The updates let you know what we have been doing and any interesting news or events relevant to ageing in New Zealand. To subscribe to the list please send an email with "subscribe hart-endusers" in the subject line to:  
[sympa@lists.massey.ac.nz](mailto:sympa@lists.massey.ac.nz)

**LOG ON TO OUR CURRENT WEB SITE TO VIEW OUR RECENT RESEARCH, PUBLICATIONS AND  
CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

[nzlsa.massey.ac.nz](http://nzlsa.massey.ac.nz)



**HAPPINESS:** Dr Annette Henricksen's recent PhD thesis on happiness noted that research was lacking regarding the intentional happiness-enhancing activities older adults engage in, and their relationships to wellbeing and health.

Annette's thesis study involved more than 3000 older adults (from the NZLSA study) and investigated how these activities can enhance wellbeing and health. This research found support for the influence of intentional activities on happiness, and of happiness on health outcomes, therefore indicating promise for improving wellbeing and health outcomes for older adults.

The activities are described as: **personally rewarding** activities that fit with interests, strengths and skills; **personal recreation and people**, which include spending time with family or friends, volunteer activities or taking part in interest groups; **spiritual and thought related**, for example positive thinking or praying; and **goal-focused**, such as devoting time to work, property, or other important personal goals.

The results of this research indicate that older adults' intentional activities are positively related to happiness, life satisfaction, and life meaning, and that these are in turn predictive of better physical and mental health. These findings point to the potential benefits of promoting older adults' intentional activities, particularly self-concordant and socially-oriented activities, for enhancing wellbeing and health.

Contact: [A.M.Henricksen@massey.ac.nz](mailto:A.M.Henricksen@massey.ac.nz)

Henricksen, A., & Stephens, C. (2012). The happiness-enhancing activities and positive practices inventory (HAPPI): Development and validation. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. DOI 10.1007/s10902-011-9317-z.

### A NEW MEASURE OF LIVING STANDARD - LS-CAP.

Dr Mary Breheny led a study to develop a measure of living standards specifically for older people whose living situations might not be captured by general measures. This measure focuses on what older people value and recognises the particular economic situations of those past retirement. To develop this measure, we interviewed 143 people aged between 65 and 93 years from a range of communities and living situations around New Zealand.

These interviews asked about the things that were important to older people and what changes they would make if their economic situation was different. From these interviews we found that six things were important to many older people: to be able to live in comfort, to be able to participate in social life, to be able to make a contribution to others, to have things to look forward to and enjoy, to feel secure about the future, and to have a range of choices. Following this, 73 questions to cover these aspects of living standards were piloted with 2000 people. A reduced set of items was included in the NZLSA survey, and from this we have chosen 25 items that measure the living standards of older people. Rather than focusing on material conditions of older people's lives, our measure focuses on older people's ability to choose what they value. People with high living standards have many choices whereas those with low living standards have fewer choices. Now that the measure has been tested, we plan to use this measure to understand the ways that differences in living standards are related to health over the life span.

Contact: [M.R.Breheny@massey.ac.nz](mailto:M.R.Breheny@massey.ac.nz)

Breheny, M., Stephens, C., Alpass, F., Stevenson, B., Carter, K., & Yeung, P. (2012). Development and Validation of a Measure of Living Standards for Older People. *Social Indicators Research*, DOI 10.1007/s11205-012-0188-4.



### HOW HAPPY ARE WE?

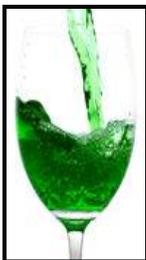
A report published in the *Journal of Psychology* last year showed that New Zealanders are happier when they are richer. The study's lead author, Nikhil Sengupta, was interviewed for Stuff this year (<http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/8187221/The-secret-to-happiness-is-money-research-shows>) and said that policy makers should take note because such findings challenge the myth that at least, poor people are happier. In fact they are more stressed and less happy. How happy were we? A first look at the data from 2012 shows that over 4 out of 5 (80%) of us were pretty or extremely happy! About 12% slightly happy and a worrying 8% said they were unhappy.

There was no significant difference in self-rated happiness between those who were retired and those working, nor did people become any happier when they retired in 2012 after working in 2010. How much people earned was also related to their happiness, but not by as much as the younger New Zealanders interviewed in the Sengupta study. Even those earning around \$20,000 or less a year were still pretty happy. It is well known that as we age, happiness improves, and these findings confirm this type of trend.



**IMPAIRED VISION AND QUALITY OF LIFE :** Professor Dr Steve LaGrow, one of HART's senior researchers, is a world expert on rehabilitation for the visually impaired. Using NZLSA data, Professor La Grow found that low vision NZLSA participants were more socially isolated or lonely, reported poorer health and lower quality of life, and expressed less satisfaction with life. One of the important contributors to quality of life, was their ability to get around. This provides an excellent focus for helping those with visual disability – improving their mobility. Contact: [S.J.LaGrow@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.J.LaGrow@massey.ac.nz)

La Grow, S., Alpass, F., Stephens, C., & Towers, A. (2011). Factors affecting perceived quality of life of older persons with self-reported visual disability. *Journal of Quality of Life*, 20(3), 404-413.



## HOW IS OUR ALCOHOL RESEARCH GOING?

You may remember that we reported some statistics about alcohol use in the last newsletter. Dr Andy Towers was previously a research officer with HWR and NZLSA and is now a senior lecturer in the School of Health and Social Services. Following on from his work with HWR study results, his main area of study is now the hazards of alcohol consumption.

Andy was recently asked to present the Health Promotion Agency sponsored keynote address to the 17th annual New Zealand National Addiction Treatment Conference; "Cutting Edge" in Wellington. The address was titled "Exploring hazardous drinking in older adults: What are the rates, impact on health, and healthcare utilisation outcomes?"

Further research now includes a research collaboration with the Health Promotion Agency to look at longitudinal analysis of older adult drinking trends and health outcomes from the NZLSA dataset. Also, Andy has just been awarded a Massey University Research Fund grant for a collaboration with researchers at UCLA (USA) and Peninsula Health (Australia) to compare rates of hazardous drinking in older adults across these three countries using a new hazardous alcohol use screen called the Alcohol-Related Problem Survey (ARPS). Findings will be reported in 2014. **Contact: [A.J.Towers@massey.ac.nz](mailto:A.J.Towers@massey.ac.nz)**

## OLDER PEOPLE AND DISASTERS



There is very little research about older people's needs in a disaster, although older people are understood to be among the more vulnerable groups. For her master's degree, Robyn Tuohy interviewed older people who had experienced a flood

in Kaitia. Those in council housing had been severely affected by sudden water rise and lost their homes and many possessions. Their stories showed that the outcomes of this disruptive event were affected by a combination of personal needs, social relationships, and the broader social context. Assessment of disaster preparedness and responses for older adults must include understanding the social environment that may differentially put this age group at risk. An assessment of these resources should include levels of social connectedness within the community, social inequality, and expectations of independence. In a disaster situation the interaction of personal and social vulnerability will influence the ability of older adults to prepare, respond to, and recover from such an event. Robyn is now exploring the disaster preparedness needs of older adults in Wellington and Christchurch for her doctoral thesis.

Tuohy, R., & Stephens, C. (2011). Exploring older adults' personal and social vulnerability in a disaster. *International Journal of Emergency Management*, 8 (1), 60-73.

## IS HEALTH PROMOTION GOOD FOR YOU?

In interview studies about people's retirement plans and about their health, we found that most people were very aware of the health promotion messages about eating well, exercising, keeping the brain active, and even the importance of socialising. Many people had changed their lifestyles in response to medical advice or health promotion messages – particularly in regard to eating well and taking more exercise. However, some people talked about disappointment. Eating well does not always prevent illness, and it sometimes seems unfair that somebody who is looking after their diet ends up with an illness, whereas others don't. People are also concerned that keeping fit does not prevent muscle pain and more tiredness as we age. There is a sense of betrayal when we realise that all the care in the world does not prevent ageing itself. Some more balance may be required in these messages.

Pond, R., Stephens, C., & Alpass, F. (2010). Virtuously watching one's health: Older adults' regulation of self in the pursuit of health. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15(5), 734–43.

Below, Professor Dr Christine Stephens is shown presenting these findings to the 2012 European Health Psychology Conference in Prague.



## SENSE OF PURPOSE IN LIFE



Dr Fiona Alpass presented these findings at the recent Australian Association of Gerontology conference in Brisbane. People with greater purpose in life generally report more happiness and life satisfaction. There is also some evidence that purpose in life is related to better cognitive functioning and longer life. We found people with a strong sense of purpose in life were happier, more satisfied with life and felt healthier. They also reported fewer symptoms of depression, and this was particularly true for those with poor mobility.

Alpass, F. (Nov, 2012). Purpose in life in relation to physical and mental well-being (abstract). *Australasian Journal on Ageing*, 31(S2), 1.



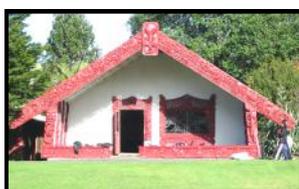


## Health and Wellbeing in Older Pacific Peoples

**Fialupe Lotoala**

Membership in different ethnic groups has been associated with different health outcomes. Pacific people have lower life-expectancy than non-Māori and non-Pacific peoples. There is limited research on the health and well-being of non-clinical, community-based older Pacific peoples in New Zealand. With the current 65+ population set to rise from 6,000 to 68,000 over the next fifty years, older Pacific people represent an important focus for research on ageing and health. Ms Fialupe Lotoala, a Massey postgraduate student, used HWR data to examine the health and wellbeing of older Pacific Peoples in New Zealand. She found that New Zealand born Pacific people reported poorer physical and mental health than Island born Pacific people. Overall, older NZ Pacific people were more likely to have lower economic living standards than NZ European and Māori participants and this provides an important explanation for poorer health. Future research on a much larger sample of older Pacific people is needed to fully investigate the drivers of successful ageing for Pacific New Zealanders. Ms Lotoala presented her findings at the Talanoa Oceania Conference in Auckland in 2011.

Lotoala, F., Alpass, F., & Breheny, M. (2011). *Health and wellbeing in older pacific peoples*. Proceedings of the Talanoa Oceania 2011 Conference, 28 – 30 November 2011, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand.



## Who Helps on our Marae?

In 2012 we asked many of you what roles you had taken on a marae during the previous 12 months. Over a quarter (28%) of those who had been employed in both 2010 and 2012 had filled a role on marae, compared to under a fifth (18%) of those who had retired in 2012 since working in 2010. Of all those who were helping on marae, almost 44% had three or more different roles (kai mahi/general help, kai karanga or pou korero, ringa wera, board member or mahi wairua).

Half of the women helping on the marae (49%) had three or more roles, and just over a third (36%) of men had three or more roles.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

**To contact members of the Health and Ageing Research Team please contact our Research Officers:**

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Ms Vicki Beagley - 06 3569099 ext 5558  
V.M.Beagley@massey.ac.nz

**or**  
**Free phone 0800 100 134**  
**Email hart@massey.ac.nz**

## Health and Ageing Research Team (HART)

The principle investigators for HART (Health and Ageing Research Team) are Professor Dr Christine Stephens and A/Professor Dr Fiona Alpass.

In developing and conducting and disseminating the findings of these studies, we have developed our team to include additional multidisciplinary researchers from Massey University's School of Psychology, the Research Centre for Māori Health Development, the School of Health and Social Services, and the School of People, Environment and Planning.

The current members of the HART team are; School of Psychology - Dr Jo Taylor, Dr Rachel Pond (insert), Mr Brendan Stevenson and Ms Vicki Beagley. School of Health and Social Services – Dr Steve La Grow, Dr Mary Breheny, Dr Andy Towers, and Dr Polly Yeung, and School of People, Environment and Planning, Juliana Mansvelt (insert).



## NEWS FLASH

The 2012 Massey University Research Medal was awarded to the Health and Ageing Research Team. The defining excellence awards ceremony was recently held at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.



DEFINING EXCELLENCE  
AWARDS

HART was also recognised in 2011 by the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG) as a Centre of Excellence in research in social gerontology, and is now a member of the IAGG's Global Ageing Research Network (GARN).

This network seeks to: exchange information about all types of topics related to ageing; set up contacts between professionals, specialists, academics, industry, health authorities, and other scientific networks; and build collaborative research programmes.