Greetings for 2012 from
The New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing Team.

Ngā mihi o te Tau Hou, Happy New Year,
Gung hei faat choih!

We welcome in the year of the Dragon and
the first newsletter for the NZLSA study, lots
to say in this newsletter in a very small
space!

This issue is special, as well as saying a big thanks
to those who were part of the study when it was
called the Health, Work & Retirement Study; we
also welcome the 1400 who joined the now re-
named NZLSA study in 2010.

And with the new name, some changes to the re-
search team. Dr Andy Towers has left the team and
is now a senior lecturer.

The new team comprises researchers from Massey
University: Associate Professor Fiona Alpass and
Associate Professor Chris Stephens; and research-
ers from the Family Centre in Wellington: Dr Peter
King and Mr Charles Waldegrave. Absent from the
photo is Dr Sally Keeling from Otago University,
Christchurch. Mr Brendan Stevenson is replacing
Andy as the research officer for the project.

Results from our surveys reported in this issue:

1. Who’s afraid of driving?
2. How can we be happier & healthier
3. Who plans for retirement—men or women?
4. How friends & family affect our health
5. Volunteering makes us happier
6. How are we drinking?

Who’s afraid of driving?

Driving is an important aspect of independence,
but as we age, driving anxiety may lead some to
give up driving altogether. Driving anxiety can be
part of other anxiety disorders such as a panic
disorder (like agoraphobia), post-traumatic stress
disorder, or even fear of driving itself. The loss of
a spouse, changes in health, eyesight, or hearing
may also have implications for driving confidence.

Dr Joanne Taylor, who is a clinical psychologist
specialising in driving anxiety, investigated the
rates among HWR respondents. She found that
while most people reported no driving fears,
around 20% endorsed a mild level of driving anxi-
ety and fear, and 4-6% rated a moderate to se-
vere level and more of these were women. Al-
though some of these fears were lifelong, many
had developed more recently.
These results will form the basis for more investigation into driving anxiety with specialist researchers at Auckland University, with a view to developing interventions that support people to keep their driving confidence for longer.

Who’s afraid of driving?

Support from friends and family affects mental and physical health.

Having supportive friends and family means that as we get older, we’ll be healthier, less likely to develop cognitive problems, and more likely to live longer. On the other hand, loneliness and isolation are precursors for worsening mental and physical health.

First, we looked at whether differences in living standards, sex, and age, might affect the types of social networks that people have (for example, some people have family based networks, and others have family and a wider range of friends). Here we found that people living in hardship were less likely to report wide ranging networks.

Secondly, we examined how these networks affected people’s feelings of being supported and loneliness. Those who felt the least lonely had wider friendship networks, or friendships based on local social activities, rather than family based networks.

Thirdly, we looked at how these feelings of support or loneliness are affecting people’s health. As expected, feelings of support were related to better health. Those who felt more lonely, had poorer physical and mental health.

Healthy social support for older people concerns the whole of society. One sign of the broader social effects is that economic inequalities are adversely affecting relationships with friends and family.

Where are these articles?
Do men and women differ in retirement planning?

Previous research has largely viewed retirement and retirement planning as a masculine activity and women have been portrayed as unconcerned and therefore ill-prepared for retirement. However, women’s increasing representation in the workforce, means that we must keep examining women’s retirement plans and the aspects of daily life that support them. Dr Jack Noone looked at the responses provided by 2277 working men and women from the NZLSA survey. His findings showed that people’s expectations for their retirement were largely associated with how well financially prepared they were. However, women are still economically disadvantaged compared to men. and this meant that they were not so well financially prepared.

Retirement and retirement planning is of greater concern for women who now are more likely to be single and responsible for their own finances.

Volunteering makes us happier

A lot of international research shows that volunteering has positive effects on health and wellbeing. That is, those who take part in activities to help others without pay (often older retired people) also report more happiness and better health. Of course questions remain about whether it is only those with better health who are able to volunteer.

Dr Patrick Dulin, an expert in volunteer research from Alaska, and Mr Jahn Gavala, a Māori researcher from Massey University, used the HWR responses to show that the more often people reported taking part in volunteer activities on a weekly basis, the higher their happiness.

There were no differences for Māori or non-Māori participants, although we still have some questions about the different ways people may decide what is volunteering and what is obligation to family or whānau. The important differences were found between those with lower and higher standards of living. Those in more hardship were more likely to be happier when they volunteered more, than those with greater comfort in their living standards. These researchers also found that Māori and those with greater hardship volunteered more often than non-Māori and those with comfortable living standards.

Where are these articles?


under-report the size and number of their drinks), we were surprised at the level of drinking that was reported. For example, 61% of Pakeha and 51% of Māori reported drinking at “hazardous” levels, with ‘binge’ drinking levels higher than those found among older adults in the USA or Brazil. Older hazardous drinkers are predominantly younger, wealthier, white, partnered males, but binge drinkers are more likely to be rural, and lack tertiary education. Of more concern was that those with diabetes or heart disease reported drinking at similar levels as the rest of the population. These somewhat alarming figures suggest that, especially for those with chronic conditions, the negative effects of alcohol are either not known or ignored.
NZLSA is a longitudinal study within which we plan to follow the progress of a group of older people and highlight the factors that help New Zealanders age well for many years to come. The study is a collaboration led jointly by the researchers at Massey University, Palmerston North and The Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit in Lower Hutt. The study is funded by the New Zealand Foundation for Research Science & Technology until 2012.

NZLSA is a research collaboration between:

Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit
Lower Hutt, Wellington Aotearoa/New Zealand

Contact Details

Our research officer, Mr Brendan Stevenson works at Massey University, Palmerston North. That is why our survey return, phone number, and other survey information services are located there.

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Update Your Contact Details

Have you changed your address since our last survey?
You are eligible to participate in the 2012 NZLSA survey (due out in April this year) and we will value your participation. The more New Zealanders who are able to update us about their situation, needs, and aspirations, the more informative our data will be.

You can let us know of your change of address or circumstances in three easy steps:

1. Phone 0800 100 134
2. Tell us your name, and what your old address details were
3. Tell us your new address and contact details

As long as we know these things we can update your details.
Please do not hesitate to let us know of any other questions or comments that you wish to make.