



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 research 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 researchers 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?

How can we be happier & healthier?

Thanks to international research, we know that people who are happier are also healthier in many ways. Some people are just born happier and so there seems to be a genetic component which sets a personal level of happiness to which we return, even after serious life events which temporarily

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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 anxiety and fear, and 4-6% rated a moderate to severe level and more of these were women. Although some of these fears were lifelong, many had developed more recently.

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...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?



How can we be happier & healthier?

...change our happiness level. But, there are differences in levels of happiness that are not completely explained by our genetic predisposition. Annette Henricksen, began her PhD research by exploring the happiness-enhancing activities that older adults engage in. First, she interviewed older people to find that there are different sorts of activities that people use to deliberately make themselves happy: activities with people, hobbies and sports, having positive thoughts and attitudes, and working on personal goals. Religious and spiritual activities, and activities that suited one's talents, were related to all of these types of activities. These findings were used as the basis for a new measure of happiness enhancing activities that was included in the 2010 questionnaire. Annette's findings from using this measure showed that activities related to being with other people, and those activities suited to one's own talents, were the most strongly related to happiness, and subsequently to physical and mental health. Interestingly, positive thinking was not such a helpful activity.

How are we drinking?

While public concern is focussed on youth drinking, older people in many Western countries are also drinking alcohol at very high rates. Public health advice is that older people should drink fewer drinks as they age because of lowered ability to process alcohol and the use of many medications. Older people who continue to use alcohol regularly are in more danger of falls and damage to brain and liver.

By using questions about your alcohol consumption, we estimated how many were drinking at hazardous levels, and how many were binge drinkers. Despite relying on people's memory and honesty (even with the best will in the world, most tend to

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?

Henricksen, A., & Stephens, C. (2010). An exploration of the happiness-enhancing activities engaged in by older adults. *Ageing International*, 35 (4) 311-326

Taylor, J., Alpass, F., Stephens, C., & Towers, A. (2010). Driving anxiety and fear in older adults in New Zealand. *Age & Ageing*, 40, 62-66

Stephens, C., Alpass, F., Towers, A., & Stevenson, B. (2011). The effects of types of social networks, perceived social support, and loneliness on the health of older people: Accounting for the social context. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 23 (6), 887-911.



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.

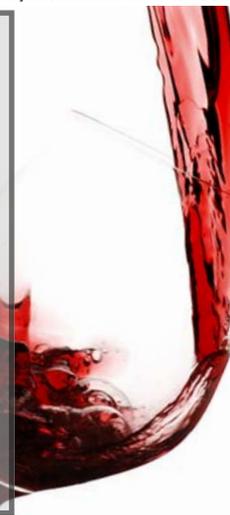
and this meant that they were not so well financially prepared. Retirement and retirement planning is of greater concern for women who now are more likely to be single and responsible for their own finances.



"Trying to get people to save for their retirement is a waste of time! We're changing our advice to people." "To what?" "Don't worry, be happy." 19 April, 2007. Fletcher, David, 1952- [Digital cartoons published from 29 July 2005 onwards plus a selection of digital cartoons published between 2001 and July 2005 in the Dominion Post]. Ref: DCCL-0003213. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://beta.natlib.govt.nz/records/23140590>

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.



Where are these articles?

Noone, J. H., Stephens, C. & Alpass, F. M. (2010). Do men and women still differ in their retirement planning? Testing a theoretical model of gendered pathways to retirement preparation. *Research on Aging*, 32(6), 715-738.

Towers, A., Stephens, C., Dulin, P., Kostick, M., Noone, J., & Alpass, F. (2011). Estimating Older Hazardous and Binge Drinking Prevalence Using AUDIT-C and AUDIT-3 Thresholds Specific to Older Adults. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

Dulin, P. L., Gavala, J., Stephens, C., Kostick, M., & McDonald, J. (in press). Volunteering predicts happiness among older Māori and Non-Māori in the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Longitudinal Study. *Aging and Mental Health*.

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.



Volunteers fixing a fence for Department of Conservation in Boundary Fence Mainland Island, Hawkes Bay



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:***



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.