

Social networks and social support of older immigrants in Aotearoa New Zealand

Research Question

We examined older migrants’ social networks and how these networks relate to social wellbeing.

Background

Maintaining social connections and being embedded in the community are crucial for healthy ageing. Migrants’ social networks often shrink as they move overseas. There are both macro and micro level social factors that influence migrants’ social connections.

Macro factors can include cultural differences between home country and host country, socioeconomic position, employment, length of stay, age at migration. Micro factors can be relationship status, social support and community engagement.

What We Did

We explored different social networks in a sample of 568 older migrants who participated in the New Zealand Health, Work and Retirement Study. We also considered how these profiles are related to the above macro and micro level social factors.

What We Found

We found four different network types.



Private-restricted: not well connected to family, friends, neighbors and wider community.

Family-dependent: relying on family connections, limited to no community engagement.

Locally integrated: frequently engaging with family, friends, neighbors and wider community; living close to family.

Wider community-based : frequently engaging with family, friends and the wider community; living far away from family.

What This Means

More older migrants in the study were self-contained and had small networks compared to those that were well connected and engaged with wider community. For the former, having a partner can counteract the lack of social support.

Why It Matters

As Aotearoa becomes more diverse, we need to know the ways different communities build and engage with social networks and support so that we can mitigate isolation.