The Influence of Psychological Strengths on Health of Older Australians Receiving Minimal Community Support

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INTRODUCTION
Ageing Population

By 2051: Australians >65 years = 30%. In the past 5 years: 21% increase in demands on Home and Community Care Services.

Psychology as a science: has focused on illness & weakness. Humanistic psychologists → study of human strengths → how characteristics act as buffers to mental and physical health.

Ranzijn, Harford and Andrews (2002):
• encourage reduction negative stereotypes of the older person,
• broadcast strengths & value of the older individual

Constructs of the positive psychology movement;
• protect against health decline
• enhance perceived quality of life

Explanatory Style
Pessimistic explanatory style = poor immune system function, higher mortality rates, & reduced recovery time → e.g. surgery. Optimism = ↑ quality of life & better health.

Dispositional Optimism
Diffs from explanatory style in that it is about more generalised positive expectancies. Positive dispositional optimism is associated with faster recovery rates from illness and surgery and less anxiety, stress and depression.

Resilience
People - high levels of resilience = better adaptive coping, ↑ likelihood of engaging in health-promoting behaviours.

AIM OF THE STUDY
To determine if the positive psychological constructs of explanatory style, dispositional optimism, & resilience have an impact on health status in older Australians.

PROJECT DESIGN
• Phase 1 - Qualitative analysis of 10 face-to-face interviews to identify strengths used to maintain health & quality of life.
• Phase 2 - Quantitative study - mail out surveys based on analysis of Phase 1.

PHASE 1 RESULTS
Emerging themes from analysis of the 10 interviews
• Good health
• Social network
• Positive outlook
• Adaptability
• Spirituality
• Being valued

PHASE 2 RESULTS
PARTICIPANTS: 630 older adults recruited through major service providers in Eastern Australia.

MATERIALS – Mailed Surveys
Outcome Variables
Health - Short-Form 36 (SF-36 V2)
Predictor Variables
Explanatory Style - Older Adults Attributional Style Questionnaire (OAASQ)
Dispositional Optimism – Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R)
Resilience- Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD – RISC)

Return rate - 25.5%: 156 useable surveys
Age: 65 – 85 years 65.4% 85 and over 32%
Accommodation:
74% lived in own home  19.9% lived in retirement unit
Marital Status:
41% married, 2% single, 5% divorced, 52% widowed
Living arrangements: 53% lived alone, 42.9% with others
Area or residence: 68% city, 20% inner regional, 8% outer regional
31% did volunteer work
Impact of Community Support on Health
91% positive/ very positive 5.1% negative

REGRESSION ANALYSIS
Explanatory style, Dispositional Optimism & Resilience explain 9.5% of variance in Physical Health Component scores. Statistically significant contribution by Explanatory style Negative events (5%) & Resilience (3%)
Explanatory style, Dispositional Optimism & Resilience explain 22% of variance in Mental Health Component scores. Statistically significant contribution by Dispositional Optimism (10%) & Resilience (3%)