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**ASSESSING COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN OLDER ADULTS AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO QUALITY OF LIFE**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctorate

in

Clinical Psychology

at Massey University, Wellington,

New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive impairment of any magnitude carries an undetermined societal and individual cost. The desire to accurately predict cognitive decline at an early stage is sought-after as robust cognitive health and function in later life is desirable. Knowing who is at risk and what those risks may be is imperative for targeting interventions to those in need. The lack of nationally representative information regarding cognitive functioning means that there is little information about base rates of cognitive functioning. This represents a problem in terms of gauging the incidence of cognitive impairment and difficulties related to planning for social and health expenditure for the ageing population. This thesis explores the validity and reliability of the Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination-Revised and develops New Zealand norms for the measure using data from the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing. These demographically stratified norms will help to determine those people who may be more vulnerable to a dementing process. The information is applied in the context of examining the impact of cognitive functioning on quality of life; an important concept to consider in research.

In article one, a pilot study of the use of the Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination-Revised (ACE-R) with older community dwelling adults, the utility of the measure was supported. In article two, the ACE-R was integrated into a nationwide longitudinal study of older adults. Stratified demographic norms were created. This is the first known nationally representative New Zealand study to provide evidence of the impact of age, gender and ethnicity on measures of cognitive functioning. In article three this information was applied in the study of the relationship between cognitive functioning and quality of life. Results suggested that cognitive functioning has a small significant association with quality of life in older age and a much larger association in those who display cognitive functioning difficulties. This research adds to the research base in New Zealand by providing representative norms from which older adults can be compared in a meaningful and specific way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great excitement that I write this page, as it means that the thesis is ready to submit! This process has not been easy – many late nights, worrying, procrastination... Now that it is all written and done, there is a hope that this research will be beneficial to others in some way to help promote quality in life. There are a number of people I would like to thank who helped me through this process. Thank you to my participants whose willingness to help and openness to share was humbling. To my supervisors, Associate Professor Fiona Alpass and Professor Janet Leathem, your guiding support through this process provided direction, discussion and discourse, thank you. Thanks to the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing, (NZLSA; Massey University and the Family Centre) for allowing me the opportunity to work in this special area and for providing such a rich and varied database to work with. A huge thanks also to my family and friends for their patience, unconditional support and unrelenting questions about when I will be finished which kept me grounded and motivated. Also thanks to some great friends: Lyn, Veena and Lucia, for the distracting conversations that added humour and enrichment to many years of study. To those at Harakeke Club, (Presbyterian Support Elder Care) thank-you; introducing and encouraging my interest in working with older adults helped me to become the person I am today.

Contribution of author to project

The author was responsible for most aspects of this research, including the formulation of research questions and data collection for the pilot study (Article 1), data analysis, interpretation and write up of the papers (Article 2 and 3). Data for Article 2 and 3 was collected and collated by the NZLSA research team, principle investigators – Associate Professor Fiona Alpass, Professor Christine Stephens, Mr Charles Waldegrave and Dr Peter King.

Candidate's Declaration

I, Lauren Callow, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology at Massey University Wellington, do hereby certify that:

1. The papers and thesis contained herein comprise entirely my original work towards the degree,
2. This work has not been submitted to any other university or institution for a higher degree,
3. The thesis including papers is less than 65,000 words in length, excluding tables, references and appendices,
4. Ethics approval for the research was obtained by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 10/23.

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Lauren Callow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ASSESSING COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN OLDER ADULTS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO QUALITY OF LIFE	I
ABSTRACT	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
TABLE OF FIGURES	IX
CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW	9
CHAPTER TWO: COGNITIVE CHANGES THAT OCCUR WITH NORMAL AGEING	18
THEORIES OF COGNITIVE CHANGE.....	18
<i>Continuum Approach</i>	18
<i>Neuro-pathological Evidence</i>	20
<i>Summary</i>	21
COGNITIVE DOMAINS AND THE IMPACT OF AGEING	21
<i>Processing Speed</i>	22
<i>Attention and Effortful/Automatic Recall</i>	22
<i>Memory</i>	24
<i>Perception</i>	26
<i>Visual-Spatial</i>	27
<i>Speech and Language</i>	27
<i>Executive Function</i>	27
<i>Summary</i>	28
CHAPTER THREE: MEASURING COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING AND CHANGE	29
STUDY ONE: COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN OLDER NEW ZEALAND ADULTS: A PILOT STUDY ON THE USE OF THE ADDENBROOKE’S COGNITIVE EXAMINATION –REVISED.	40
CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN COGNITIVE AGEING	61
<i>Age</i>	62
<i>Genetic influences</i>	63
<i>Activity</i>	63
<i>Social Support</i>	64
<i>Education</i>	64
<i>Physical health</i>	65
<i>Emotional health</i>	66
<i>Summary</i>	67
STUDY TWO: NORMATIVE DATA FOR OLDER NEW ZEALANDERS ON THE ADDENBROOKE’S COGNITIVE EXAMINATION-REVISED AND THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES.	68
CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITY OF LIFE AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN OLDER AGE	100
<i>Background</i>	100
<i>Definition and Conceptualization of quality of life in older adults</i>	100
<i>Measuring Quality of life</i>	102
<i>Quality of life in Older Age</i>	105
<i>Cognition and quality of life</i>	107
<i>Conclusions</i>	114
STUDY THREE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY OF LIFE AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING IN COMMUNITY DWELLING OLDER ADULTS IN NEW ZEALAND	116
RESULTS.....	131

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION	144
APPENDICES	151
APPENDIX A: ADVERTISEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS	151
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET	154
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS	156
<i>Interpreter’s consent form.</i>	157
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	158
APPENDIX E: COGNITIVE AND MOOD MEASURES	159
<i>Addenbrooke’s Cognitive Examination-Revised</i>	159
<i>Measures used in the Health Retirement Study (US)</i>	165
<i>Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)</i>	167
<i>Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale</i>	168
<i>Geriatric Anxiety Inventory</i>	169
APPENDIX F: SCALES USED IN ARTICLE THREE	170
REFERENCES	173

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: COGNITIVE SUB-TESTS USED IN LONGITUDINAL STUDIES	31
TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF COMMONLY USED ASSESSMENT TOOLS RELATIVE TO ASPECTS OF COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING.	33
TABLE 3: COMMONLY USED MEASURES OF COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING.....	37
TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	48
TABLE 5: PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ACE-R SUBSCALES AND OTHER COGNITIVE TESTS	53
TABLE 6: ACE-R RESULT SUMMARY	54
TABLE 7: TWO TAILED T-TEST COMPARISONS OF ACE-R AND SUB-DOMAIN SCORES BETWEEN THE CURRENT SAMPLE AND THE ACE-R ORIGINAL CONTROL GROUP.....	54
TABLE 8: MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CURRENT SAMPLE AND HRS SAMPLE ON DIFFERENT COGNITIVE TESTS	57
TABLE 9: CROSS-COUNTRY ACE-R SCORE DIFFERENCE IN CONTROL GROUP PARTICIPANTS	71
TABLE 10: CHARACTERISTICS OF NZLSA WEIGHTED FACE TO FACE STUDY POPULATION COMPARED TO GENERAL POPULATION USING CENSUS DATA FROM 2006	76
TABLE 11: ‘KIWI’ ACE-R TOTAL AND SUB-DOMAIN SCORES (N=1005).....	80
TABLE 12: PEARSON’S CORRELATIONS (R) OF THE ‘KIWI’ ACE-R TOTAL AND SUB-DOMAIN SCORES.	81
TABLE 13: WEIGHTED MEAN SCORES (STANDARD DEVIATION) ON TOTAL ‘KIWI’ ACE-R AND 5 DOMAIN SUB-SCALES ACROSS FOUR AGE GROUPS	83
TABLE 14: WEIGHTED MEANS, (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) FOR ‘KIWI’ ACE-R SCORE BY HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED AND BY AGE GROUP.....	85
TABLE 15: WEIGHTED ‘KIWI’ ACE-R AND SUB-DOMAIN MEANS, (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) AND 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVALS FOR NEW ZEALAND EUROPEAN AND MĀORI BY AGE GROUP	87
TABLE 16: WEIGHTED MEANS (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) AND 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL FOR ‘KIWI’ ACE-R SCORES ACROSS SEX AND AGE GROUP.	88
TABLE 17: MEANS (SD) AND T-TEST COMPARISONS BETWEEN HRS (2008) AND NZLSA (2010) RESULTS	90
TABLE 18: CLINICAL AND NON-CLINICAL STUDIES INVESTIGATING THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING AND QUALITY OF LIFE	110
TABLE 19: CHARACTERISTICS OF NZLSA WEIGHTED FACE TO FACE STUDY POPULATION COMPARED TO GENERAL POPULATION USING CENSUS DATA FROM 2006	126
TABLE 20: PEARSON CORRELATIONS (R) BETWEEN QUALITY OF LIFE MEASURES AND SUB-DOMAINS.....	133
TABLE 21: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND MINIMUM, MAXIMUM SCORES FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE MEASURES (N=1005)	133
TABLE 22: PEARSON CORRELATIONS (R) BETWEEN ‘KIWI’ ACE-R TOTAL AND SUB-DOMAIN SCORES AND QUALITY OF LIFE MEASURES.....	134
TABLE 23: HIERARCHICAL MULTIPLE REGRESSION WITH R ² CHANGE EXPLAINING THE VARIANCE IN QUALITY OF LIFE SCORES IN TWO DIFFERENT MODELS	135
TABLE 24: T-TESTS FOR HIGH AND LOW ‘KIWI’ ACE-R SCORERS (<82>) ON MEAN QUALITY OF LIFE SCORES	137

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF ACE-R SCORES SHOWING NORMAL DISTRIBUTION CURVE.	53
FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF 'KIWI' ACE-R SCORES SHOWING NORMAL DISTRIBUTION CURVE FOR THE NORMATIVE GROUP.	80
FIGURE 3: STANDARDIZED 'KIWI' ACE-R AND DOMAIN SCORE FOR DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS.	83
FIGURE 4: ESTIMATED MARGINAL MEANS FOR THE 'KIWI' ACE-R BY AGE AND EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	86
FIGURE 5: STANDARDIZED MEAN SCORES OF 'KIWI' ACE-R DOMAINS BY PRIMARY ETHNIC AFFILIATION.	87
FIGURE 6: ESTIMATED MARGINAL 'KIWI' ACE-R MEANS FOR MALES AND FEMALES BY AGE GROUP	89