

Social support in later life: patterns, transitions and associated factors.

Findings from a Latent Transition Analysis

Chatzi G, Demakakos P, and Nazroo J.

georgia.chatzi@manchester.ac.uk

p.demakakos@ucl.ac.uk

james.nazroo@manchester.ac.uk

Background

- Social support is described as social bonds, social networks, social contact and human companionship
- Convoy theory for Social Networks suggests that relationships remain stable over time
- The pattern-centered approach can explain the dynamic and multidimensionality of these relationships
 - Number and type of close connections
 - Positive and negative dimensions of the relations

Research questions

- Are there qualitatively distinct groups of ELSA participants who demonstrate particular patterns of social support from their spouses, children, family, and friends?
- To what extent does the nature of the social support that individuals receive change over time?
- Is the nature of the social support received by ELSA participants related to their well-being?
- How are different pattern of social support associated with employment, marital status, and health characteristics?

Results

- Prevalence in social support classes:
 - High (65%) – high quality relationships with spouse and children
 - Moderate (22%) – close relationships with children but lacking close relationships with a spouse
 - Low (13%) – without children and poor relationships with spouse and children (if they had any)
- 13% of those in High Social Support in Wave 4 moved to moderate social support class by Wave 9
- High social support class had lower scores on depression, and higher scores in quality of life and life satisfaction while moderate social class the opposite
- Retired and Unemployed were more likely to be in the low social support class
- Single and never married were less likely to be in the higher social support class and less likely move to a better class over time
- Those with poorer health and having functional difficulties were less likely to be in the higher social support class and less likely move to a better class over time

Summary

- The majority of participants belong to the high social support class
- Only a small proportion change social support class over time
- Strong relationships predict better well-being
- Employment, having a spouse, and better health predict strong social relationships and no changes over time
- Changes that occur in levels of social support are strongly related to central elements of older people's lives

Acknowledgements

ELSA is coordinated by four main institutions: University College London (UCL), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), the University of Manchester, NatCen Social Research and the University of East Anglia

Funding for all eight waves of ELSA has been provided by the US National Institute on Aging and several UK government departments.

The departments that contributed to wave 9 included the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Transport, and Department for Work and Pensions.

The UK government funding has been coordinated during this period by the National Institute for Health Research. Members of the UK Government Departments funding the study have provided helpful comments on drafts of this report, but the views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of these funding organisations.