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Older people and their social spaces: A study of well-being and attachment to place in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

A sense of belonging or attachment to place is believed to help maintain a sense of identity and well-being, and to facilitate successful adjustments in old age. Older people in particular have been shown to draw meaning and security from the places in which they live. Qualitative data from multiple conversational interviews held over the period of a year with each of 83 community-dwelling older people in Auckland within the context of a study conducted from 2006 to 2008 are interpreted to explore how older people relate to their social and physical environments, with a specific focus on attachment to place and the meaning of home. The concept of "social space"™ is proposed, to capture the elastic physical, imaginative, emotional and symbolic experiences of and connections to people and place across time and in scope. Talking with older people themselves gave a rich account of attachment to place, social spaces, and well-being.

Our participants had strong attachments to their homes and neighbourhoods, extensive participation in “beyond spaces”™, and shrinking social worlds. They did not, however necessarily view changes as negative; instead there was a delicate negotiation of positive and negative aspects, and complex engagement with “social space”™ as a profoundly meaningful construct.



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Keywords

Social space; Older people; Home; Neighbourhood; Attachment to place; New Zealand; Well-being

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