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THE SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SERVICE NEEDS OF AUSTRALIA'S AGEING GREEK MIGRANTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a literature review undertaken to shape an emerging social research program on the service and support needs of Australia's ageing Greek migrants. In late 2009 a narrative review was conducted of published and "grey" literature to determine the scope of articles, with an emphasis on services and supports which help older people remain independent in the community. The search returned an extensive amount of international literature on ageing populations, but only a very small number of publications on the service use and needs of Australia's older Greek population. Barriers to service use included low proficiency in English, lack of Greek-speaking service providers, low awareness of services available, and various cultural issues. The review also identified a lack of research carried out in the Greek language by researchers with a Greek background, which suggests that the views of older Greek migrants may

be missing from much social research. We conclude that a sustained and culturally appropriate research effort conducted in the first language is needed and is essential if community-based services are to become more appropriate and accessible for the older members of Australia's Greek communities.

Keywords: Review, services, Greek, ageing, migrants, Australia

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the results of a literature review undertaken to shape an emerging research program to explore the role of culture and migration on positive and healthy ageing for the older Greek-speaking communities of South Australia and the Northern Territory, in particular to determine the accessibility and appropriateness of services. The review aimed to identify what research had previously been conducted on the appropriateness of services, and the support needs from the point of view of older Greek people themselves. This group predominantly migrated to Australia between the 1940s and 1960s, and constitute a significant proportion of Australia's current ageing population. At the last national census Australia had 49,530 residents aged over 65 born in Greece and 5,350 born in Cyprus (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2006).

It has been suggested that, to continue to live independently in their homes, older Greek-speakers rely heavily on informal supports, such as family, friends and community (ABS 2002). Anecdotal evidence provided spontaneously to the research team in 2008 by members of Adelaide's Greek communities, Greek organisations and Greek-speaking Members of Parliament, suggested that South Australia's ageing Greek migrants were regularly seeking help from a range of informal services which may not be available on a sustainable basis, including family, Greek-speaking doctors (GPs) and local Greek speaking Members of Parliament. While successive State and Federal governments in Australia have sought to address the needs of ageing citizens from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) through a combination of ethno-specific and mainstream services (Radermacher, Feldman & Browning 2009), it is unclear whether the needs of such communities are in fact being met (Luszcz et al 2007). Some suggest there is minimal information on and evaluation of the outcomes for ageing

migrants of either mainstream or ethno-specific services (Radermacher, Feldman & Browning 2009). This issue will become more pressing as the cohort continues to age and make up a significant segment of Australia's ageing population. The cultural appropriateness of services for ageing CALD migrants is also a significant issue requiring attention (Johnstone & Kanitsaki 2008). It is important because there is a significant public and policy focus on the ageing of Australia's "baby boomer" generation, while little consideration has been given to the other "major social phenomenon of our time: the ageing of the post-war migrant generation" (Migliorino 2010).

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The literature review was undertaken between October and December 2009 as a rapid review (see Ganann, Ciliska & Thomas 2010 for discussion of rapid versus systematic reviews). It was conducted by a first generation Greek-Australian research assistant fluent in Greek and English, and who reviewed literature in both languages. A range of sources were used to locate published academic articles and unpublished ("grey") literature (e.g. government and agency reports, conference proceedings). Advice was also sought on other relevant literature by contacting organisations which support ageing Greek communities in Australia. A range of online databases were searched including Informit, Web of Knowledge, and Google Scholar, with keyword search terms including "Greek", "Greek Australian", "immigrants", "access", "services", "needs", "aged", "ageing", "Australian migrants", "ethnic", "research". Initially the search was confined to Australian studies, but the very small numbers of articles identified meant that an iterative approach was then used to widen the search criteria to include items from outside Australia and items about the needs of ageing CALD communities in general. Three hundred and thirty items were located, of which 38 met all the criteria and were included in the final review.

THE LITERATURE FOR AUSTRALIA

Although the search returned an extensive amount of international literature, and with some references to the ageing Greek diaspora, only a few items related to

support services and the Greek aged population in Australia. Only one item was found specifically on the research topic: a book reporting a study of Greek elders in Victoria, published by Fronditha Care (Tsingas 1988). The book provides a demographic analysis of Melbourne's "Greek elder population" and explores access to social support and community services and issues of health, retirement, leisure and loneliness. In Australia's top ageing journal (*Australasian Journal on Ageing*) we only located five articles over the last 23 years with a focus on CALD older people and community based services, in which people with a Greek back-ground were mentioned in passing. We could not locate any article exclusively on older Greeks in this or any other Australian journal. This finding is supported by the conclusions of an earlier literature review which also found a wide range of research on ageing but "a paucity of research conducted on the aged in terms of cultural and social diversity" (Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet 1995: 2).

ISSUES AFFECTING SUPPORT & SERVICE USE

Concern about the needs of ageing CALD migrants has been discussed in the formal literature and by governments since the early 1980s (eg Department of Health & Family Services 1998; Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet 1995; Hugo 1984; Hugo & Wood 1984). The small number of articles and reports found in our review identified a range of issues for CALD communities (including older Greek speakers) that affect their willingness and ability to access services that can assist with ageing positively, particularly in their own homes. These issues include: language and communication, lack of access to information about services, cultural beliefs on appropriate aged care, and social isolation. Each of these is explored below.

Language and communication

Many migrants in Australia from non-English speaking backgrounds, including Greek speakers, maintain use of their first language at home (Hugo et al 2009). At the 2006 Census 23 per cent of older South Australians who were born in a non-English speaking country said they could not speak English well or could not

speak it at all; and for those aged 75+ the proportion was 30 per cent (Hugo et al 2009). Of the Greece-born residents aged 65+ in South Australia, 47 per cent speak Greek at home, while 70 per cent of those aged 80+ have little or no spoken English (Government of South Australia 2009). These generations are characterised by low levels of English literacy because many were employed in manual jobs after arriving in Australia and had no access to English language classes (Thomas 2003). Hugo et al (2009: 71) also note that a lack of English language skills can be "an important barrier to accessing services and interacting socially". Further, Orb (2002) and Messimeri-Kianidis (2007) point out that as CALD migrants age, many revert to their language of origin in preference to any English they may have learned, and this is particularly so if they have limited education or are affected by cognitive decline.

Availability of services and assistance in the first language is identified by a number of writers as the most significant factor influencing service access by ageing CALD populations (eg Hugo 1983). Mykyta (1998) suggests that non-English speakers are likely to respond positively to the provision of bilingual staff when they first make contact with a service and in subsequent service use. A small survey several decades ago in South Australia's Riverland district also found a greater likelihood of service attendance if services were provided by people with a Greek background and Greek language skills (Hugo & Menzies 1980; Radford & Salonikilas 1980). Indeed, there was a reluctance among older Greeks to interact at all with non-Greek service providers, even to the extent of travelling four hours to the main city of Adelaide to obtain the services of a Greek doctor (Radford & Salonikilas 1980:11).

This study also found that Isolation and separateness of the older Greeks from mainstream community life was even greater than that of the Greek community as a whole. In the context of a significant ageing CALD cohort in Australia, providing language-appropriate information and services is therefore likely to be an important facilitator of access. Mansoor (2007) suggests that a workforce program to attract and train bilingual staff in aged care will be needed, while Messimeri-Kianidis (2007) observes that this need is arising at a time when trained interpreters are retiring and replacements are not entering the profession. Two recent literature reviews on the health care needs of elderly CALD migrants and the delivery of community aged care services conclude with recommendations to provide

interpreting services, increase the number of accredited interpreters and bilingual staff in mainstream organisations, and encourage services to participate in cross-cultural awareness training (Orb 2002; Radermacher, Feldman & Browning 2008).

Information about services

Many services report under-utilization by ethnic communities both in Australia and overseas (Luszcz et al 2009; Orb 2002), and a barrier with a strong relationship to language is lack of accessible information about what services are available. A personal lack of knowledge on a specific issue, such as health, may mean that an older person or carer does not know what assistance to seek in the first place (Morse & Messimeri-Kianidis 2002). It is not clear whether this is simply because communities are unaware that services exist and cannot obtain information about them in their first language, or because they perceive the services to be culturally inappropriate or generally not useful. However, language barriers and related cultural barriers have been found to disadvantage the aged in obtaining information, for example about pension rights (Orb 2002). Furthermore, recent research with older Greek and Italian migrants in South Australia shows that they rarely use the Internet or mobile text alerts to access online information about services, despite these becoming an increased focus of service providers (Goodall, Ward & Newman 2010).

Cultural beliefs

Cultural beliefs are also an important issue relating to the types of services that older Greek migrants will access. Referring to the ethnic aged in general, Gelfand (2003) explains that tradition and psychosocial attitudes may discourage older people from obtaining the help they need due to negative feelings which their generation associates with accepting charity, even though they are aware of their needs and understand how to access services. Emke-Poulopoulou's (1999) European study of preferences for living in nursing homes, for example, found that Greek elders have one of the lowest preference rates in Europe (i.e. 0%). The study also found that, of all European Union countries, Greece has the lowest percentage of elders living in nursing homes (1.8%) compared to Holland (9.1%),

while many Greek elders live with their children (35%), which is less than in Spain (48%) but far more than in Denmark (7%). A study of housing attitudes among those aged 55+ in South Australia, including some participants from CALD backgrounds, also found a general preference for retaining the family home, with an important influence being convenience to shops, buses, friends and local services (Faulkner, Tually & Baker 2007).

Cultural expectations also heavily influence who provides care and support to Greek elders. A study of caregiving within Australian-Greek families in Victoria found that "it was their responsibility or duty as a husband, wife, mother, father, sister, brother or in-law to provide care to their ill or disabled family member" (Morse & Messimeri-Kianidis 2002:308). However, this study also showed that while such beliefs can lead to families dutifully caring for aged and disabled members, the family-based caregiver is likely to be left alone to manage the burdens. Aged Greek speakers are found to often rely on their spouse or family members, especially daughters, to access services (Morse & Messimeri-Kianidis 2002; McCallum & Gelfand 1990), yet with more women remaining in the workforce for longer this is becoming a problem for the aged and creating conflict in the carer's family (Morse & Messimeri-Kianidis 2002).

Social Isolation

Related to language and culture differences from the mainstream aged population, older people from CALD backgrounds may be more at risk of social isolation if the attitudes and values of their Australian-born children are significantly different to their own. One Australian study found that many Greece-born elders felt isolated and regretted having left their country of birth, especially if they did not enjoy strong relationships with their adult children (Buckland-Fuller 1988). By contrast, in Greece the same author found that elderly people had constant contact with others in their small villages (Buckland-Fuller 1985). Henkin, Santiago and Sonkowsky (1997) found that, among ageing CALD groups, feelings of social isolation were exacerbated by language differences and feelings of helplessness, increased by a lack of bilingual staff to assist in banking, shopping, accessing health and social services, and public transport.

Research issues

The literature review unexpectedly revealed two research-related issues. Firstly, that there is a need for more research to identify the needs of culture-specific ageing groups. Secondly, that research methods need to be culturally appropriate and allow for the representation of views of older people from these groups, in particular by conducting research in their first language. Meyers (1980) pointed out several decades ago that policymakers and program administrators may often differ with people of ethnic communities on what are the desired and perceived needs of those communities. Sax (1993) recommended that special efforts are needed to ensure that appropriate provision is made within mainstream services and that each CALD group requires separate assessment, while the lack of research into the needs and support systems for older Australians from CALD backgrounds was also identified more recently by Rao, Warburton and Bartlett (2006). Sax (1993) also recommends consultation *with* the relevant ethnic community when planning facilities or services and, where possible, that ethnic community members be employed as members of staff. Scarfo (2009), writing in the United States, argues that diverse social groups can also contribute to develop research programs based on community needs. This is particularly important if services and research are to be seen as relevant to the group, and hence likely to be used by them.

In addition, it is clear from the literature review that the views of older CALD migrants themselves are often excluded from research due to a lack of language appropriate mechanisms to allow their inclusion. For example, research budget limitations often preclude the employment of bilingual staff to collect and analyse data, or incur expensive transcription and translation of questionnaires and interviews if they are to include in research surveys and interviews those people who are not proficient in written or spoken English (Blignault & Haghshenas 2005; Cheng et al 2009). As discussed earlier, a large proportion of older Greek migrants in Australia have little or no English proficiency so that, on this basis, their views are likely to be excluded from much research. As an example, a recent Western Australia study, on housing intentions among the aged community, distributed surveys in English and replaced four people from follow-up interviews because they did not speak or understand English well (Boldy et al 2009). A number of writers have identified the importance of providing interpreters and first language inter-

viewers to include older CALD citizens in research (eg Bird et al 2009; Grimes 1986; Orb 2002; Radermacher, Feldman & Browning 2009). However, the longer-term employment in research teams of research staff with native language and cultural expertise relevant to the communities of interest could further facilitate the inclusion in research of CALD migrant elders with low English proficiency.

CONCLUSION

Our literature review found some published research in Australia about the use of support services by, and the needs of, older CALD migrants in general. However, it located less literature on ageing migrants from particular cultural communities, and very little on the service and support needs of Australia's older Greek migrants. Growth in the numbers of CALD aged in developed countries which received migrants after World War II is a key issue for policy makers and service providers to address in the coming ten to twenty years. However, as yet, little sustained research effort appears to have been undertaken to identify and address the needs of individual CALD communities. The issues identified from this literature review, including the role of language, culture and social isolation as barriers to the use of formal services, are already being explored further in a bi-cultural pilot research project which incorporates researchers who are Greek language specialists, alongside social and ageing researchers with an Anglo-background (see Newman et al 2011, this issue). It is intended that this will go some way towards addressing the lack of research information in Australia regarding service accessibility and appropriateness for older Greek migrants by consulting directly with actual and potential service users in their native Greek language and by working with Greek community organisations. Such research is essential if community-based health and social support services are to meet the needs of Australia's growing ageing CALD populations in a way that supports their successful and healthy ageing, and ongoing independence in the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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