

Social capital, loneliness and mental well-being in an ageing population: social inequalities

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Background

Social capital covers different characteristics such as social networks, social participation, social support, social cohesion, attitudes and trust. The definition by Robert Putnam (2000) is commonly adopted within health research, suggesting that networks of civic engagement foster trust needed for cooperation and coordinated actions.

Although an underlying assumption is that social capital is good for mental well-being, little research has been conducted on establishing the associations and mechanisms between social capital and mental well-being, particularly among older people.

Aims

1. To describe the distribution of social capital according to different socio-demographic variables such as ethnicity, gender, age and socioeconomic status
2. To explore whether social capital contributes to mental well-being in an ageing population either independently or in interaction with other key socio-demographic variables
3. To investigate the influence of loneliness as one mechanism that governs the association between social capital and mental well-being

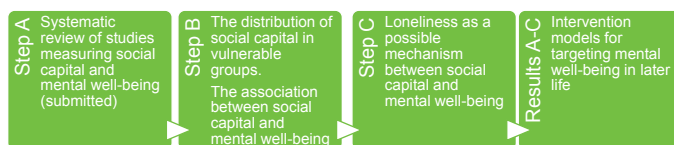


Figure 1. Description of study steps.

Indicators to be analysed

- Social capital
e.g. social participation, social networks and support, trust, political participation
- Feelings of loneliness
- Self-rated health
- Mental well-being
e.g. sense of mastery, happiness, satisfaction with life
- Mental health
e.g. depressive symptoms
- Functional and cognitive limitations

Data

This study analyses data from four different studies:

Gerontological Regional Database and Resource Centre project (GERDA)

web.novia.fi/gerda

Western Finland Mental Health Survey

www.thl.fi/mthenkat

Collaborative Research on Ageing in Europe (COURAGE)

www.courageproject.eu

European Social Survey (ESS)

www.europeansocialsurvey.org



Figure 2. Map of regions included in the GERDA project.

Significance and use of expected results

- The results will be disseminated through national and international publications, seminars and conferences
- Results will help us to provide models on how to promote mental well-being in an ageing population
- The multidisciplinary research group will generate new knowledge on socio-environmental and health factors related to well-being in older people

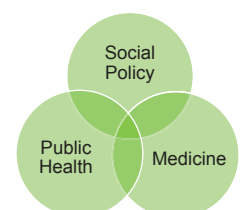


Figure 3. A multidisciplinary research group.

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