LIVING ALONE AS A LIFE STYLE
among
Older People in New Zealand

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Living alone in New Zealand


Source: Statistics New Zealand 2014, customised data
People 65+ years living alone in New Zealand as % of total population living alone, by gender, 2001, 2006, 2013

Source: Statistics New Zealand 2014, customised data
Middle-aged and older people living alone in New Zealand

Middle aged 45-64 years, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Females (%)</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
<th>Total 45-64 years (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Older people 65+ Years, by gender

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Females (%)</th>
<th>Males (%)</th>
<th>Total 65+ years (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Older people (65+) living alone by ethnicity, 2001, 2006, 2013

- Other: 9% (2001), 0% (2006), 13% (2013)
Older people living alone in the regions, compared with total older people living alone in New Zealand

Older people 65+ living alone as a percent of total 65+ living alone, by region, 2013
Why live alone (as an older person)?
Motivation for Living Alone comes from:

• Freedom and greater choice/personal control – in use of time, resources and activities

• Being able to do things by/for yourself – personal care, household maintenance, going places.
Styles of living alone as an older person

1. Lived alone – always

2. Living alone with occasional family visit
3. Living in the same town/suburb where family member, friend, or volunteer visits regularly
4. Living alone with occasional stay overs of a friend/family
5. Routine of living alone/and with others for part of the year, e.g. 1/3 living alone, 1/3 with daughter, 1/3 with son.

6. Living alone with a pet, teddy bear, robotic dog.
Future trends?

• Continuing to live alone possibly becoming a lifestyle choice - choosing not to live with their family/whanau or with others...but also want to be connected. The idea of “living apart, together” (LATs).

• Those who live alone “compensate for lowered social contact in the household by being more socially active, and cities with high numbers of singletons enjoy a thriving public culture” (Klinenberg, 2012).
Why would you NOT live alone as an older person?  De-motivators for living alone

• Poor or declining health

• Loneliness and sense of isolation

• Lack of mobility or transport

• Difficulty in decision making

• Limited financial skills.
“No-one to help me if I fall”
“No-one to take me anywhere – to the medical centre, shopping”
No-one to take responsibility
No-one to talk or share with
No-one to hug
No-one to provide another perspective, or to help with decisions.
“A meaningful life for an older person is a life where the person living it has

• a sense of purpose, or motivation, and

• a feeling of significance” (Koopman-Boyden, 2014).
What provides a sense of purpose for older people?

• Personal activities (self-relationship)
  – doing things by/for themselves, personal care, exercise, routines etc

• Social interaction (inter-personal relationship)
  – Contact with family and friends, marae, interest groups

• Work outside home (public relationship)
  – Paid work, unpaid work, or volunteering.
What provides a feeling of significance? For older people?

- Achievement
  - taking a walk, a productive garden, learning a new skill
- Being valued or appreciated
  - being referred to by younger generation, intergenerational interchanges
- Giving back, continued contribution
  - volunteering, donations, contributions to marae
- Being there, belonging
  - to support a grandchild’s interests, in a family emergency.
Suggestions FROM older people, FOR policy and practice, re Meaningful Life

Mobility

• Bus stops closer to supermarkets
• Wider pavements for mobility scooters
• Chairs in shops.

Maintenance

• Low maintenance, single person houses with new technology alarms, lighting, heating etc.

Finances

• Advice on budgeting and managing finances
• Simpler procedures for reporting financial abuse.
Suggestions for policy and practice (cont)

Health and Nutrition
- Regular hearing, teeth and vision checks at GP visits.

Emergency support
- Life tubes (Age Concern), Ecolite dynamo kits
- House & social alarms.

Social connectedness
- Programmes/courses for those starting to live alone
- Regular ‘senior hour’ at local cafes
- Internet courses.
Technological possibilities

• Health monitoring watch

• Vivago watch – social alarm

• Smart watches – iWatches from Apple.....
“A meaningful life for an older person is a life where the person living it has

• a sense of purpose, or motivation, and

• a feeling of significance”  (Koopman-Boyden, 2014).
Key points for Active Ageing and Meaningful Life for older people living alone (cont)

• Keep busy
• Be valued
• Keep connected.
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Older people in New Zealand

Projected population of 65+ New Zealanders 2006 (base) – 2031 (% of total population)

Source: Statistics New Zealand, 2012
Middle-aged living alone in New Zealand

People 45-64 years living alone in New Zealand as % of total population living alone, by gender, 2001, 2006, 2013

- **Females** (% of 45-65 years living alone)
  - 2001: 54%
  - 2006: 52%
  - 2013: 52%

- **Males** (% of 45-64 years living alone)
  - 2001: 46%
  - 2006: 48%
  - 2013: 48%

- **Total 45-64 years living alone** (% of all ages living alone)
  - 2001: 30%
  - 2006: 33%
  - 2013: 36%
Overseas examples

- First contact service
- Vivago watch – social alarm
- Intergenerational solidarity programmes.
Older people living alone compared with total older people living with/without others, by region

Older people living in private dwelling alone, as a percent of total older people living in private dwellings with/without others, by region, 2013

Northland Region: 24%
Auckland Region: 28%
Waikato Region: 28%
Bay of Plenty Region: 28%
Gisborne Region: 28%
Hawke’s Bay Region: 31%
Taranaki Region: 30%
Manawatu-Wanganui Region: 32%
Wellington Region: 32%
Tasman Region: 32%
Nelson Region: 26%
Marlborough Region: 28%
West Coast Region: 34%
Canterbury Region: 30%
Otago Region: 32%
Southland Region: 32%