

CCRC Report:

Social Networking During The First Months After Moving To A Continuing Care Retirement Community

by

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Introduction

This report examines the social world of individuals who had recently moved to a continuing care retirement community operated by either Brookdale Senior Living, or Life Care Services. It presents results from a study of the personal and social qualities that are associated with a successful transition into the continuing care retirement community (CCRC) environment. Historically, studies of relocation and residential transitions have focused on their negative effect on the lives of older people, and generally dealt with instances where the move was involuntary. Both morbidity and mortality for example have been found to increase significantly when an older person is forced to move from a community setting into an assisted living or nursing home facility. At the same time there has been a steady but relatively low key line of research suggesting that in many instances a residential change – especially one that does not involve moving to a total institution type of environment--can bring great satisfaction and an enhanced quality of life to men and women in their later years.

The residential change subset of relocations studies began with the early work of Francis Carp in the 1960s. Her focus was on the impact of a move from private community dwellings to a new public housing facility for the elderly. More recently, the growth of CCRCs has led to a renewed interest in successful transitions into new environments such as the CCRC. To date research has found that person-factors such as personality, resilience, the ability to perform common activities of daily life, and involvement in social activities are associated with adaptation. There has also been an interest in the built and social environment. How architectural and environmental features and the social context interact with and facilitate quality of life. A major limitation however has been that the majority of studies have been conducted well after the move.

The present study was conceptualized as a pilot study of 50 persons relocating from the community to a CCRC. Each was to be interviewed approximately three months following the move. This time frame was selected because it captures a period of time when people undergoing a transition are still in the process of adapting to their new life circumstance, and yet still remember in detail their old life (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990).

A mixed method approach was followed that included a number of structured instruments that have been used successfully in previous studies of transitions (e.g., personality inventory, time perspective, checklist of activities and interests, social network), as well as structured and unstructured questions tailored to the specific context (e.g., attachment to place, expectations, built environment).

The study built on the PI's experience over approximately 30 years of studying how men and women of all ages, and from various cultures, adapt to new living situations and life transitions. His master's thesis was an analysis of self-actualization among highly successful middle agers, and from that point on he has examined issues related to successful coping. His doctoral thesis dealt with the role of personal and architectural features in the prediction of long term adaptation to three types of residential change: 1) relocation from the community to a nursing home; 2)

relocation from a small nursing home to a large state facility; and 3) relocation from a large state facility to smaller private nursing homes. Of interest in that research, as well as the present investigation, was how well the individual was adapting, and generally how satisfied.

Method

During the Fall and Winter of 2011 and 2012, 51 new residents were interviewed over the phone. A variety of structured and unstructured questions were asked. One standardized inventory of emotional well-being discussed in this report, the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire, has been found to represent a comprehensive measure of current mental health (Goldberg & Williams, 1988; Pevalin, 2000).

The Sample

The average length of time the residents had lived in their new home was nearly three months (Table 1). A total of 54.9% had been residents for two months or less, with the actual time ranging from one week to six months, which means that all or nearly all the participants were still in the midst of the transitional experience (e.g., Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Goodman & Schlossberg, 2006; Turner, 1969). A total of 51% lived in either Croasdaile Village (Durham, NC) or Lake Port Square (Leesburg, FL). Born between 1920 and 1945, their average age was close to 80 (the youngest was 66 and the oldest was over 90), and approximately 57% were female. Equal proportions were currently married (45.1%) and widowed (45.1%). Their educational attainment was relatively high for their birth cohorts, with 58.8% having either a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Table 1. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

	Number (percent) or Average (standard deviation)
Average months in CCRC	2.71 (1.45)
Average Age	79.59 (5.85)
Female	29 (56.9)
Married or with partner	24 (47.1)
Widowed	23 (45.1)
Bachelor's degree	13 (25.5)
Graduate degree	17 (33.3)

Results

Most of the questions discussed in this report deal either with the individual's social network as it existed since the moved to the CCRC, or with their current emotional well-being. Generally,

people seem to have adapted extremely well. In most cases only one or two people gave responses indicating they were having problems in their new community. In the following commentary, separate tables are provided for responses to each question. While a single table might have sufficed, it seemed that it might be helpful for readers to see the full range of responses, including both those doing very well and those who were not.

Social Network and Sense of Community

The information here presented consists of simple frequency distributions. The focus is on how the move to a new community affected social relations and a sense of community. This focus was due to our sense that a move to a new neighborhood often creates a feeling of isolation, of not being part of one's new community. In terms of transitions theory (e.g., Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969), the new residents had at least begun the process of severing ties with their old community, and learn what to expect in their new environment. Most, indeed, seem well on their way to the stage of becoming established in their new residence.

In general, then, the majority of residents seem to have handled the transition quite well. Less than a quarter of the participants reported feeling more distant from people. Remarkably, two thirds reported the move had had no effect, and about 12% reported that they felt less distance from others than they had in the past, before the move.

Table 2. Do you feel more or less distant now?

		Number	Percent
Valid	More Distant	11	21.6
	No Effect	34	66.7
	Less Distant	6	11.8
	Total	51	100.0

Similar patterns were found in responses to other questions. For example, only about 8% of the new residents reported feeling they often lacked companionship.

Table 3. How often do you lack companionship?

		Number	Percent
Valid	Often	4	7.8
	Some of the time	15	29.4
	Hardly ever or never	32	62.7
Total		51	100.0

Only two people (4%) often felt left out of things. In contrast, nearly three quarters felt this happened hardly ever or never.

Table 4. How often do you feel left out of things?

		Number	Percent
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Valid	Often	2	3.9
	Some of the time	12	23.5
	Hardly ever or never	37	72.5
	Total	51	100.0

Similarly, only one person reported often feeling isolated (Table 5). The overwhelming majority, over 80%, reported hardly ever feeling isolated or never feeling isolated.

Table 5. How often to you feel isolated?

		Number	Percent
Valid	Often	1	2.0
	Some of the time	7	13.7
	Hardly ever or never	43	84.3
	Total	51	100.0

Responses in general indicated that the new residents were becoming involved in their new life. Over 80%, again, reported that they often got together with members of their new community (Table 6). This was a rare event for only two of the 51 new residents (4%).

Table 6. How often do you get together with one or more members from your new community?

		Number	Percent
Valid	Often	43	84.3
	Some of the time	6	11.8
	Hardly ever or never	2	3.9
	Total	51	100.0

Nearly all had met new friends in the CCRC (Table 7). Only one person had not.

Table 7. Have you met new people or friends?

		Number	Percent
Valid	Yes	50	98.0
	No	1	2.0
Total		51	100.0

We also we asked two more general questions. When asked whether they agreed with the statement that they are satisfied the social supports available to them in their new living arrangement, the majority either agreed completely (53%) or simply agreed (39%). None disagreed or disagreed completely (Table 8). In other words, the social opportunities made available in their new community were satisfactory to all: none disagreed with the statement that they were satisfied with supports available in the new living arrangements.

Table 8. Are you satisfied with the social support available to you.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree completely	27	52.9
	Agree	20	39.2
	Neutral	3	5.9
	Total	50	98.0

The second more general question asked participants how much they felt they belonged to their present community, only three residents (6%) said not at all. Forty-nine percent said they felt very much part of the CCRC, and 45% gave a more middle of the road response (Table 9). The three who said not at all are a subject of concern, and in future reports we will look more closely at these residents, and others that gave responses indicating some ambiguity about their new lives. On the other hand, given that none of the residents had lived in their communities for more than six months, the results are encouraging: they suggest that most residents were moderately to well-advanced in the process of becoming part of their community.

Table 9. How much do you feel like you belong in your present community?

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Not at All	3	5.9
	Somewhat	23	45.1
	Very Much	25	49.0
	Total	51	100.0

Emotional Well-Being in the CCRC

When the new residents were asked to respond to the 12 item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), their responses generally indicated either that things were the same as usual or better. The highest report of improved well being was in responses to a question about happiness. As shown in Table 10, 40% reported feeling happier than usual, and 56% reported happiness the same as usual. Feeling able to face up to their problems had the greatest likelihood of stability, with 84% reporting no change.

Responses to the negatively –worded items were generally a mirror image of the positively-worded items. From 18% to 42% reported that they were doing better. For example, 42% reported that they were less likely to think of themselves as a worthless person, 40% reported a reduction in feelings of strain, and 30% reported feeling unhappy or depressed less often. The area with an indication of greater problems had to do with feeling one could not overcome difficulties they faced. Some 10% (5 people) reported feeling this way more often than usual.

Table 10. Participant responses to the General Health Questionnaire-12, by percent (and number).¹

	Much Less than Usual	Same as Usual	More than Usual	Much More than Usual
Able to concentrate	12.0 (6)	68.0 (34)	18.0 (9)	2.0 (1)
Feel play a useful part	12.2 (6)	81.6 (40)	4.1 (4)	2.0 (1)
Capable of making decisions	4.0 (2)	78.0 (39)	14.0 (7)	4.0 (2)
Able to enjoy daily activities	10.0 (5)	70.0 (35)	18.0 (9)	2.0 (1)
Able to face up to problems	8.0 (4)	84.0 (42)	8.0 (4)	0.0 (0)
Feel happy	4.0 (2)	56.0 (28)	36.0 (18)	4.0 (2)
Felt unhappy or depressed	30.0 (15)	58.0 (29)	10.0 (5)	2.0 (1)
Lost sleep over worry	30 (15)	64 (32)	6.0 (3)	0.0 (0)
Constantly under strain	40.0 (20)	54.0 (27)	4.0 (2)	2.0 (1)
Couldn't overcome difficulties	18.0 (9)	72.0 (36)	8.0 (4)	2.0 (1)
Losing confidence in self	28.0 (14)	66.0 (33)	6.0 (3)	0.0 (0)
Thinks is worthless person	42.0 (21)	56.0 (28)	2.0 (1)	0.0 (0)

¹The number of participants responding to each question on the GHQ-12 varied from 49-50, resulting in slight differences in the percent-number match.

A Comparison of Key Indicators of Social Adaptation by Length of Stay at the CCRC

A key factor in social adaptation following relocation to a new environment often is how much time has elapsed since the move. To simplify analyses of the role of time we divided length of time in the participant's new home into shorter (under three months) and longer (three months or more) time intervals. Results suggest that the process of adaptation was still occurring, but there were no significant differences between the two groups. This lack of significance may result from the relatively small sample size.

As shown in Table 11, the results generally indicate that both groups were well on their way to complete adaptation to their new environment. For example, 32% of the newest arrivals reported they felt more distant from other people, while this proportion dropped to 3% among those who had lived in the CCRC for 3 to 6 months. Proportionately fewer of the three plus month group also reported a lack of companionship, feeling left out or isolated, had not met new friends, rarely interacted with their new neighbors, or reported they did not feel like they belonged in their new community. However, the three month plus group were proportionately higher in reporting that they did not often get together with neighbors, and in reporting a lack of satisfaction with social supports. All of these differences, it bears repeating, were not significant. Generally both groups were showing clear signs of satisfaction with their CCRC.

Table 11. Indicators of adaptation for residents who had spent less than three months at their retirement community, versus three months or more, by percent (and number).

Variable	Under 3 Months	3 Months to 6 More
Feels more distant from people	32.0 (8)	3.0 (13)
Reports lack of companionship	8.0 (2)	4.3 (1)
Feels left out	4.0 (1)	0.0 (0)

Feels isolated	4.0 (1)	0.0 (0)
Gets together with neighbors some of the time or rarely	12.0 (3)	17.4 (4)
Has not met new friends	4.0 (1)	0.0 (0)
Is not satisfied with living arrangements	4.2 (1)	4.3 (1)
Rarely interacts with CCRC neighbors	12.0 (3)	4.3 (1)
Does not feel like belongs to new community	12.0 (3)	0.0 (0)
Not satisfied with social supports	4.1 (1)	8.7 (2)

Further mention is deserved for the belongingness question. Only three people reported they did not feel like they belonged in their new community, and all of these were in the less-than-three-month group. Moreover, when people were asked if they had experienced a sense of community at their prior community residence, all 7 of those who reported they previously had not felt part of the community felt that they now belonged at the the community. In contrast , 41 of the 44 people who did have a sense of community at their last residence reported feeling they belonged to their new community. Only 3 (6.7%) reported they did not currently feel like they belonged, and, as noted before, these people were all in the newest arrival group. These individuals may have been more disrupted by the move from a place where they felt they belonged.

A Comparison Of Key Indicators Of Emotional Well-Being By Length Of Stay At The CCRC, showing percent (and number) report more than usual problems

Only two of the cross-tabulations even approached significance, being at the .08 probability level (based on associated contingency coefficients): residents who had spent three or more months at their CCRC tended to be less likely to report more problems sleeping and or to report more problems with self confidence than usual. Overall, though, comparisons of those with shorter and longer stays suggested there may be a small (and non-significant) reduction in reported problems for 7 of the 12 areas covered by the General Health Questionnaire. Two of the longer stay participants however did report feeling happy less often than usual, and the proportions reporting feeling unhappy or depressed, and being unable to face up to problems, remained quite stable.

Table 12. Indicators of emotional well-being for residents who had spent less than three months at their retirement community, versus three months or more, by percent (and number).

Variable	Under 3 Months	3 Months to 6 More
Not able to concentrate	16.7 (4)	8.7 (2)
Doesn't feel plays a useful part	16.7 (4)	8.7 (2)
Not capable of making decisions	4.2 (1)	4.3 (1)
Not able to enjoy daily activities	12.5 (3)	4.3 (1)
Not able to face up to problems	8.3 (2)	8.7 (2)
Doesn't feel happy	0.0 (0)	8.7 (2)
More unhappy or depressed	12.5 (3)	13.0 (3)
Lost sleep over worry	12.5 (3)	0.0 (0)
Constantly under strain	8.3 (2)	0.0 (0)
Couldn't overcome difficulties	8.3 (2)	13.0 (3)
Losing confidence in self	12.5 (3)	0.0 (0)
Thinks is worthless person	4.2 (1)	0.0 (0)

Discussion

The results presented in this report suggest that the majority of new residents were adjusting quite well to their new CCRC living environment. While relatively few individuals gave responses indicative of a problem, the existence of these few individuals does emphasize the fact that regardless of the generally voluntary nature of the move from completely independent living to a CCRC, problems exist. Comparison of how those who had lived in the CCRCs for less than three months and those who had lived for three to six months generally suggested that residents were continuing to adapt to their new environment even up to six months post relocation.

In future reports we may be able to merge data from the two studies that together constitute the project funded through the Institute for Optimal Aging. This would allow us to do more detailed assessments of the thrivers as well as those few who were not doing so well.

References

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