

*“We help each other”:*  
Relational patterns  
among older  
individuals in  
Southern African  
samples

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# Outline of presentation

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- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion and contribution



# Introduction: Ageing

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- Ageing: a reflection of our successes but with accompanied challenges
- Psychological well-being and ageing
- Quality of social interactions and well-being (Chippis & Jarvis, 2015)
- What about context?



# Introduction: Relational Well-being

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- Understanding relational well-being
- Extension of self (Aron & Aron, 1996)
- Belonginess (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
- Positive social relationships and well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)
- Indigenous perspectives (McGregor et al., 2003)





# Introduction: Relational well-being and ageing

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Challenges of ageing and satisfaction in relationships

Life span model (Gergen & Gergen, 2001)

Different relational networks and well-being



# Introduction: Context

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- Different contexts and different outcomes for well-being (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010)
- Loss of place and social exclusion
- Formation of belongingness across contexts
- Social change and relationships
- Little attention from policy-makers
- Changing family structures
- Relational coping (Roos et al., 2013)
- Family values versus individuality
- Urbanisation and poverty (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015)



# Context of the study

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## Ganyesa

- Setswana-speak rural community
- 19.1% some secondary education
- 20% household income from 9000 to 19000 ZAR
- 5.4% of population aged 65 years and above

## Ikakeng

- Setswana-speaking semi-urban community
- 39% some secondary education
- 23% household income from 19000 to 38000 ZAR
- 4.5% of population aged 65 years and above



# Research aim

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- The primary aim of the present study was to explore the reasons for important relationships in rural (Ganyesa) and urban (Ikageng) South African contexts as described by older individuals
- A secondary aim of the study was to compare the reasons for important relationships across the urban and rural samples



# Methods

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- Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology study (PURE-SA; Teo et al. 2009) and the FORT 3 project (Wissing, 2008/2012)
- Ganyesa and Ikaheng communities
- Ganyesa,  $n = 16$  males,  $n = 34$  females
- Ikaheng,  $n = 14$  males,  $n = 36$  females
- Mean Age: Ganyesa  $M = 67$  years ( $SD = 5.31$ ) and Ikaheng  $M = 70$  years ( $SD = 8.35$ )
- Semi-structured open-ended questions: Most important relationships and why?
- Thematic analysis

# Findings and discussion

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# Summary of common themes

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## Relational support dynamics

- Providing support
- Receiving support
- Mutual support

## Spirituality and relational dynamics

- Accountability and sense of security
- Sense of identity and spiritual support

## Need for resources and generativity






# Relational support dynamics

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- *“Children.....I love my children very much” (R/P 1, 60-year old female)*
- *“Neighbours..... Is the first person to respond in good or bad times, and also looks after my house when I am not there” (R/P 5, 63-year old female)*
- *“Sister....She helps me and I'll always support her” (U/P 1, 60-year old female)*

# Relational support dynamics

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Providing  
support and  
mutual  
exchange

- Independence and utility (Thomas, 2010)
- Identity
- Life opportunities for growth (Feeney & Collins, 2015)

Enacted  
support

- Improved life conditions (Seidlecki et al., 2014)
- Presence of safety net (Kakwani & Subbaro, 2007)



# Spirituality and relational dynamics

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- *“God..... So that He can see the works that I have done, so that when I die He would have seen my works” (U/P 15, 63-year old female)*
- *“God..... Because when I pray, after a while, I see answers and that life changes for the better” (R/P 11, 61-year old male).*



# Spirituality and relational dynamics

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Accountability,  
security and  
expectation of  
support

- Recognition of a Higher power
- Interconnectedness between the living and dead (Chilisa, 2011)
- Religious involvement and support (Krause & Hayward, 2014)

Identity and  
spiritual  
support

- Answers to prayer
- Determination of appropriate behaviours (Chilisa, 2011)



# Need for resources and generativity

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- *“Money...I want to be able to support myself and my children because their father passed away” (R/P 10, 61-year old female)*
- *“Work...I want to work for my kids so they have a beautiful place to live in, I want them to have a bright future” (R/P 10, 61-year old female)*



# Need for resources and generativity

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- Relational coping
- Social investment
- Reciprocal care and interactions across generations
- Importance of in-group members





## Cordiality and harmony

*“Family.....I get along with my family” (R/P 6, 60-year old female)*

*“Family.....We get along with each other” (R/P 1, 64-year old female)*

Balance in responsibilities and negotiated roles (Plug, 2009)

# Differing themes

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## Urban

- **Appreciation of Family as Source of Well-being**
- *“Children.....They are my life and I make sure that they fit in the community”*  
(U/P 1, 60-year old female)

## Rural

- **Dependability and Trust**
- *“Friend....We are like a tooth and a cavity, we trust each other at all times”* (R/P 4, 68-year old male)



# Conclusions and contributions of the study

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- Giving of support and mutual exchange
- Horizontal and vertical relatedness for purpose and identity
- Little difference between urban and rural context
- Dependability and trust in rural contexts
- Nuclear family and urbanisation
- Interdependency: financial stability, respect for elderly, predictability and trust (McCubbin et al., 2013)
- Extension of self



# Limitations

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- Limited sample in the North West Province
- Degree of urbanisation between communities
- Similar cultural groups

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# Thanks for listening & Questions.....

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