Ageing in a Foreign Land: The Health Experiences of European-Born Post-War Migrants to Australia

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDIX TABLES</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>XII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>XIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>XV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1 Research question</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2 Study aims and objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3 Outline of chapters</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4 Summary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2: MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 A general overview of migration and settlement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 The migration process and other key concepts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Settlement, acculturation and issues affecting immigrant health</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Migration to Australia: A historical background &amp; policy context</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1 Clarification of Australia’s post-WWII period</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2 ‘White Australia Policy’</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.3 ‘Populate or Perish’</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.4 Placement of migrants</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.5 Post-1970’s shifts in Australia’s migration policies &amp; intakes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Australia’s post-WWII settlement policies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Assimilation &amp; integration</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 Multiculturalism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Demographic challenges associated with a multicultural Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 3: MIGRANT HEALTH &amp; AGEING – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2 Demographic characteristics ................................................................. 82
5.3.3 Health and health-related outcomes ..................................................... 83
5.4 Summary .................................................................................................. 87

CHAPTER 6: STUDY TWO – MIGRANT STATUS AS A RISK FACTOR FOR POORER
HEALTH OUTCOMES IN OLDER AUSTRALIAN, GERMAN, ITALIAN AND GREEK-
BORN SOUTH AUSTRALIANS ........................................................................ 89
6.1 Study aims .............................................................................................. 89
6.2 Methods .................................................................................................. 89
  6.2.1 Sample and sampling procedure ......................................................... 90
  6.2.2 Informed consent and withdrawal criteria ........................................... 90
  6.2.3 Pilot testing .......................................................................................... 90
  6.2.4 Data collection ...................................................................................... 91
  6.2.5 Validation ............................................................................................. 91
  6.2.6 Ethical considerations ......................................................................... 91
  6.2.7 SAMSS data items .............................................................................. 91
  6.2.8 SAMSS response and participation rates ............................................. 95
  6.2.9 Bias ..................................................................................................... 96
  6.2.10 Weighting .......................................................................................... 97
  6.2.11 SAMSS study sample ........................................................................ 97
  6.2.12 Data analysis ...................................................................................... 98
6.3 Results ..................................................................................................... 99
  6.3.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 99
  6.3.2 Descriptive analysis .......................................................................... 99
  6.3.3 Multivariable analysis ....................................................................... 106
6.4 Summary .................................................................................................. 108

CHAPTER 7: STUDY THREE – TRANSITIONS IN HEALTH OVER TIME IN
AUSTRALIAN, GERMAN, ITALIAN AND GREEK-BORN SOUTH AUSTRALIANS AGED
50 TO 79 ........................................................................................................ 111
7.1 Study aims .............................................................................................. 111
7.2 Methods .................................................................................................. 111
  7.2.1 SERCIS Migrant HS and Mental HS background .................................. 112
  7.2.2 Sample and sampling procedure (SERCIS Migrant HS and Mental HS) ... 113
  7.2.3 Informed consent ............................................................................... 116
  7.2.4 Pilot Testing ........................................................................................ 117
  7.2.5 Data collection .................................................................................... 117
  7.2.6 Validation ........................................................................................... 117
  7.2.7 Data items .......................................................................................... 117
  7.2.8 Migrant HS, Mental HS and SAMSS Response Rates ......................... 119
CHAPTER 8: STUDY FOUR – HEALTH AND WELLBEING EXPERIENCES OF OLDER GREEK-BORN SOUTH AUSTRALIANS, A QUALITATIVE STUDY

8.1 Study aims

8.2 Methods
   8.2.1 Survey design
   8.2.2 Interviewers and interviewer training
   8.2.3 Informed consent and withdrawal criteria
   8.2.4 Pilot testing
   8.2.5 Survey material and questions
   8.2.6 Ethical considerations
   8.2.7 Data collection
   8.2.8 Data items

8.3 Results
   8.3.1 Demographic characteristics
   8.3.2 Health outcomes of Greek-born South Australians

8.4 Summary
   8.4.1 Health service use
   8.4.2 Family as a vehicle for health information and support
   8.4.3 Life-course histories affecting health in later life

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

9.1 Differences in health outcomes
9.2 Deterioration of health over time
9.3 Aggregation of country of birth
9.4 HME as a concept to explain migrant health
9.5 Future research
9.6 Limitations
9.7 Strengths

7.2.9 Weighting
7.2.10 Study sample
7.2.11 Data analysis
7.3 Results
7.3.1 Introduction
7.3.2 Descriptive analysis
7.3.3 Comparison across birthplace groups – Age-sex standardisations
7.3.4 Comparison across birthplace groups – Percentage difference
7.3.5 Comparison across birthplace groups – Marginal probabilities
7.4 Summary

7.2.9 Weighting
7.2.10 Study sample
7.2.11 Data analysis
7.3 Results
7.3.1 Introduction
7.3.2 Descriptive analysis
7.3.3 Comparison across birthplace groups – Age-sex standardisations
7.3.4 Comparison across birthplace groups – Percentage difference
7.3.5 Comparison across birthplace groups – Marginal probabilities
7.4 Summary

CHAPTER 8: STUDY FOUR – HEALTH AND WELLBEING EXPERIENCES OF OLDER GREEK-BORN SOUTH AUSTRALIANS, A QUALITATIVE STUDY

8.1 Study aims

8.2 Methods
   8.2.1 Survey design
   8.2.2 Interviewers and interviewer training
   8.2.3 Informed consent and withdrawal criteria
   8.2.4 Pilot testing
   8.2.5 Survey material and questions
   8.2.6 Ethical considerations
   8.2.7 Data collection
   8.2.8 Data items

8.3 Results
   8.3.1 Demographic characteristics
   8.3.2 Health outcomes of Greek-born South Australians

8.4 Summary
   8.4.1 Health service use
   8.4.2 Family as a vehicle for health information and support
   8.4.3 Life-course histories affecting health in later life

APPENDIX B: CONCORDANCE BETWEEN COUNTRY OF BIRTH CLASSIFICATION STRUCTURES .............................................................................................................. 194

APPENDIX C: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM QUESTIONNAIRE .............................................................................................................. 196

APPENDIX D: EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM DATA ITEMS .......................................................................................... 246

APPENDIX E: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM WEIGHTING FORMULA .............................................................................................................. 255

APPENDIX F: EXPLANATORY NOTES AND COMPARABILITY OF DATA ITEMS FROM THE MIGRANT HEALTH SURVEY (SERCIS), MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY (SERCIS) AND SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (SAMSS) .... 256

APPENDIX G: MIGRANT HEALTH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................................................................................. 262

APPENDIX H: MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................................................................................. 274

APPENDIX I: GREEK-BORN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE .................................................................................................................. 290

APPENDIX J: PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION SURVEY MATERIAL .................................................................................................................. 293

APPENDIX K: PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................................................................................. 301

REFERENCES .............................................................................................................................................................................. 326
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Active ageing framework ................................................................. 36
Figure 4.1: Study framework investigating the health status of Australia’s post-war migrants .... 61
Figure 4.2: Summary of analytical plan .................................................................. 67
Figure 7.1: Age-Sex Standardised Percentage Difference in Arthritis prevalence from 1996/97 to 2007 - 2012 in Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years ......................................................................................... 133
Figure 7.2: Age-Sex Standardised Difference in Osteoporosis prevalence from 1996/97 to 2007 - 2012 in Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years .................................................................................................................. 134
Figure 7.3: Age-Sex Adjusted Percentage Difference in Asthma prevalence from 1996/97 to 2007 - 2012 in Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years .................................................................................................................. 134
Figure 7.4: Age-Sex Standardised Percentage Difference in Diabetes prevalence from 1996/97 to 2007 - 2012 in Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years.................................................................................................................. 135
Figure 7.5: Age-Sex Standardised Percentage Difference in Cardiovascular Disease prevalence from 1996/97 to 2007 - 2012 in Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years .................................................................................................................. 136

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1: Summary of sample selection and interviews completed ..................................... 71
Table 5.2: Summary of 1989/90, 2001 and 2007/08 NHS response and participation rates ........ 80
Table 5.3: Breakdown of NHS sample by year, age and birthplace group participants aged between 45 and 79 years, in 1989/90, 2001 and 2007/08 ....................................................................................................................... 81
Table 5.4: Demographic characteristics of Australian and European-born individuals, data limited to specific age groups in 1989/90, 2001 & 2007/08 National Health Survey .............................................. 85
Table 5.5: Selected risk factors and health conditions for Australian and European-born individuals, data limited to specific age groups in 1989/90, 2001 & 2007/08 National Health Survey ................................................................................................................................. 86
Table 6.1: Summary of SAMSS population of interest ........................................................ 89
Table 6.2: Summary of SAMSS response rates during January 2004 to December 2012 ......... 95
Table 6.3: Breakdown of SAMSS sample by year and birthplace group participants aged 65 years and over, SAMSS from (calendar years) January 2004 and December 2012* .................. 97
Table 6.4: Socio-demographic profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 65 years and over, using SAMSS data from 2004 to 2012

Table 6.5: Chronic condition profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 65 years and over, using SAMSS data from 2004 to 2012

Table 6.6: Risk factor profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 65 years and over, using SAMSS data from 2004 to 2012

Table 6.7: Multivariate analysis of socio-demographic variables and risk factors in relation to self-rated health and selected chronic conditions, using SAMSS data from 2004 to 2012

Table 7.1: Summary of population of interest

Table 7.2: Summary of previous SERCIS surveys undertaken in Stage One of the sampling procedure

Table 7.3: Summary of Stage Two and Stage Three sampling procedure

Table 7.4: Summary of the Mental Health Survey sampling procedure

Table 7.5: Migrant Health Survey and Mental Health Survey response rates

Table 7.6: Summary of SAMSS response rates during January 2007 to December 2012

Table 7.7: Breakdown of the MHS sample by birthplace group participants aged 50-69 years, October 1996 - July 1997

Table 7.8: Breakdown of SAMSS sample by year and birthplace group participants aged 60-79 years, SAMSS from January 2007 and December 2012

Table 7.9: Unadjusted weighted socio-demographic profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years, using 1996/97 SERCIS data and 2007-2012 SAMSS data

Table 7.10: Unadjusted weighted chronic condition profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years, using 1996/97 SERCIS data and 2007-2012 SAMSS data

Table 7.11: Unadjusted weighted risk factor profile of Australian, German, Italian and Greek-born South Australians aged 50-79 years, using 1996/97 SERCIS data and 2007-2012 SAMSS data

Table 7.12: Weighted and age-sex standardised chronic conditions using SERCIS data from 1996/97 and SAMSS data from 2007 to 2012

Table 7.13: Weighted and age-sex standardised health-related risk factors using SERCIS data from 1996/97 and SAMSS data from 2007 to 2012

Table 7.14: Marginal probabilities of developing a chronic condition in 1996/97 using SERCIS Data in 2007-2012 using SAMSS data of those aged 50-69 and 60-79
Table 8.1: Summary of Study Four sample................................................................. 141
Table 8.2: Study Four Interviewer Summary............................................................. 144
Table 8.3: Summary of Study Four domains included in the questionnaire ............. 146
Table 8.4: Summary Study Four sample characteristics........................................ 146
Table 8.5: Demographic characteristics of South Australian Greek-born participants aged 60 years and over................................................................. 152
Table 8.6: Profile of health conditions for Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over........................................................................................................ 153
Table 8.7: Profile of mental health issues for Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over........................................................................................................ 153
Table 8.8: Health-related risk factor profile for Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over........................................................................................................ 154
Table 8.9: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over using a range of South Australian health services....................................................... 155
Table 8.10: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over reporting on whether there are sufficient Greek speaking medical services available in South Australia................................................................. 156
Table 8.11: Where Greek-born South Australians, aged 60 years and over, get their health advice from and what impacts most on their health decisions ......................................................... 157
Table 8.12: Caring preferences if Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over were to have a health problem which made them dependent on others .................. 158
Table 8.13: Proportion of Greek-born respondents, aged 60 years and over, who believed they would be cared for in the way they liked in the future......................................................... 158
Table 8.14: Proportion of Greek-born respondents, aged 60 years and over, who believed they would have been cared for better if you had stayed in Greece ....................... 159
Table 8.15: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over who agreed or disagreed that older people should be able to depend on their adult children for the help they need ................................................................. 159
Table 8.16: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over who agreed or disagreed with being able to seek support from family or friends when sick........ 161
Table 8.17: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians receiving support from children and children-in-law.......................................................................................... 162
Table 8.18: Proportion of Greek-born South Australians, aged 60 years and over who receive adequate information required for their day-to-day life ........................................... 162
Table 8.19: Main language spoken at home and the English proficiency of Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over ........................................................................................................ 163

Table 8.20: Proportion and frequency of which Greek-born South Australians, aged 60 years and over, requiring an interpreter ........................................................................................................ 164

LIST OF APPENDIX TABLES

A.1: Demographic questions asked of participants and coding of variables for 1989, 2001 and 2007/08 National Health Survey Variables of Interest .................................................................................. 191

A.2: Risk factor questions asked of participants and coding of variables for 1989, 2001 and 2007/08 National Health Survey ........................................................................................................ 192

A.3: Long-Term Conditions asked of participants and coding of variables for 1989/90, 2001 and 2007/08 National Health Survey ........................................................................................................ 193

B.1: Concordance between country of birth classification structures ........................................... 194

D.1: Demographic questions asked of SAMSS participants including how variables were derived .................................................................................................................. 246

D.2: Health and mental health questions asked of SAMSS participants including coding of variables .................................................................................................................. 249

D.3: Health-related behaviours asked of SAMSS participants including coding of variables .... 253

F.1: Demographic questions asked of survey participants including how variables were derived .................................................................................................................. 256

F.2: Health conditions asked of survey participants including how variables were derived........ 258

F.3: Health-related behaviours asked of survey participants including how variables were derived .................................................................................................................. 260

I.1: Demographic information of South Australian Greeks, who arrived in Australia between 1945-1975, 60 years and over, Census 2011 .................................................................................. 290

I.2: Socio-Demographic information of South Australian Greeks, who arrived in Australia between 1945-1975, 60 years and over, Census 2011 .................................................................................. 291

I.3: Proportion of South Australian Greeks in South Australian Local Government Area’s (LGAs), who arrived in Australia between 1945-1975, 60 years and over, Census 2011 ........ 292
ABSTRACT

It is commonly observed that immigrants display superior health upon arrival, and for some years following settlement, in their adopted country compared to their native-born counterparts. However, with increased years since migration there is a propensity for this health advantage to dissipate and for health trajectories of some migrant groups to reach, and in some cases fall below, the host national averages. This research aimed to explore the health status of older European-born immigrants as the burden and magnitude of disease outcomes in later life is unclear. This is due partly to a large body of dated literature relying on mortality and hospitalisation data to describe the health status of migrant populations and a historical trend to aggregate country of birth (COB) into large groupings ignoring inherent differences within and between birthplace groups.

Using national Australian data, the health status of European and Australian-born groups were explored to provide a descriptive assessment of health outcomes at three points in time. This study illustrated that although both European and Australian-born groups displayed increases in the prevalence of selected chronic conditions, the European-born generally had better health and health-related outcomes. There was also some evidence to suggest that a health advantage may exist for European-born migrants in relation to some chronic conditions.

Cross-sectional data collected from the South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System (SAMSS) explored differences in chronic conditions and health-related risk factors between selected birthplaces (including those born in Australia, Germany, Italy and Greece). This study demonstrated that significant differences exist in the health profiles of birthplace groups, where Italian and Greeks experience higher prevalence of some chronic conditions and risk factors compared to the Australian and German-born.
Pooled data collected via SAMSS and the Migrant Health Survey described and compared the demographic, health and health-related characteristics of selected birthplace groups at two points in time and examined the magnitude of change in disease outcomes relative to their Australian-born counterparts. Overall, the results indicated that the Greek and Italian-born had poorer health outcomes over time and displayed the largest change in their health and health-related outcomes. These findings suggested there is a considerable divergence in the long-term health outcomes experienced by selected COB groups and highlighted the value in undertaking birthplace specific analysis.

Semi-structured interviews with Greek-born South Australians aged 60 years and over was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the health experiences and health-related outcomes of ageing Greek-born South Australians. The findings from this study indicated that 1) health service utilisation may not be an adequate indicator to explain the health differentials experienced by this cohort; 2) children may be Greek-born older migrants most important social resource and act as a vehicle for gaining access to health advice and the support they need in their day-to-day lives; and 3) life-course histories are pivotal in explaining health in later life.

This research allowed for the comparisons of demographic, health and health-related outcomes to be analysed over time and across birthplace groups, providing additional information and insight into the diversity of outcomes within and between birthplace groups and adding depth to existing knowledge around migrant health outcomes.
DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Constance Kourbelis

22 December 2015
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
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<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCCSS</td>
<td>Australian Standard Classification of Countries for Social Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASGC</td>
<td>Australian Standard Geographic Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASGS</td>
<td>Australian Statistical Geographic Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>Body Mass Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>Consumer Directed Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>Census Collection Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COB</td>
<td>Country of Birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPD</td>
<td>Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURF</td>
<td>Confidentialised Unit Record Files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVD</td>
<td>Cardiovascular Disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIAC</td>
<td>Department of Immigration and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESB</td>
<td>English Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWP</td>
<td>Electronic White Pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHQ-28</td>
<td>General Health Questionnaire (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOCSA</td>
<td>Greek Orthodox Community of South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GWC</td>
<td>Greek Welfare Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HME</td>
<td>Health Migrant Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HILDA</td>
<td>Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPND</td>
<td>Integrated Public Number Database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K10</td>
<td>Kessler Psychological Distress Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGAs</td>
<td>Local Government Areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>