Theoretical Framework

- Substantial literature documents the positive effects of social networks on various aspects of health (Amieux et al., 2010).
- Most studies translate social networks in the quantity and quality of personal relationships.
- Quality of personal relationships have been shown to be most effective in old age (Charles & Carstensen, 2010).
- Development of more social theories which stress the importance of groups and social identity in addition to personal relationships (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012).

Research Questions

- Do groups enable a better coping to separation (divorce, separation, widowhood) in the second half of life?
- Concerning identity, what is the respective role of identity continuity (Spini & Jopp, in press)?

Hypotheses:

- Belonging to social groups would have a positive effect on well-being after the loss of an intimate partner.
- Belonging to social groups would have a positive effect of continuity.
- Continuity would mediate the relationship between belonging to groups and well-being, and/or...
- ...there would be an interaction between group belonging, continuity and time to cope with the partner loss.

Measures

Continuity measure (Source: Catherine Haslam, personal communication)

- I am the same person as I always was.
- Over time, lots of things have changed, but I am still the same person.
- I can not make sense of the changes I have been through.
- I am the same person as I always was.
- My past helps me to understand my present life.
- I am a different person now than I was in the past.
- There is no connection between my past and present.

Social groups: (Source Jetten et al., 2012)

- Which groups are you member of?
- How important is this group? (1 = not at all; 5 = very important)
- Do you feel integrated in this group?

Total n of groups = 4442
Most cited groups: Sport 27.33%; Hobbies (games, etc.) 14.57%; Cultural (Choral, music, theatre, folkloric groups, etc.) 11.64%; Professional or unions 10.72%...

Life satisfaction: 5-item scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Ex: «I am satisfied with my life»

Depression (CES-D Radloff, 1977). Ex: «I felt depressed», «I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing»

Data

Analyses were based on the “Vulnerability and Growth. Developmental dynamics and differential effects of the loss of an intimate partner in the second half of life” study, a prospective questionnaire-study on the partner loss in Swiss adult population (Hutchison et al., 2013).

Age: 40-90 years
Group of divorced and widowed who experienced loss or breakup within the last 5 years. Divorced n = 1236 (40-65 years); Widowed n = 569 (65+ years)
Group of age-matched continuously married controls, n = 1085

Recruitment plan: Swiss Federal Office of Statistics
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 0 and 2 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 2 and 5 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 5 and 10 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 10 and 20 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 20 and 30 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 30 and 40 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 40 and 50 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 50 and 65 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 65 and 80 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements
Vulnerable loss group (loss between 80 and 100 years ago): Recruitment by direct advertisements

Main Findings

- Belonging to social groups was found to have a positive effect on well-being.
- Belonging to social groups had a positive effect of continuity.
- In contrast to our expectations, continuity did not mediate the relationship between belonging to groups and well-being.
- The interaction between group membership and the time to event was not significant.
- There was no interaction between continuity and the time to event.

References

Amieux, H., Steckhan, B., Mathurun, F., Mcinerney, A., Antunes, T. C., & Dartigues, J. F. (2010). What aspects of social network are protective for dementia? not the quantity but the quality of social interactions is protective up to 15 years later. Psychosom Med (52), 363-911. (0047)