The Role of Perceived Social and Physical Environments on Older Adults´ Social Interactions

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Key Findings - 1

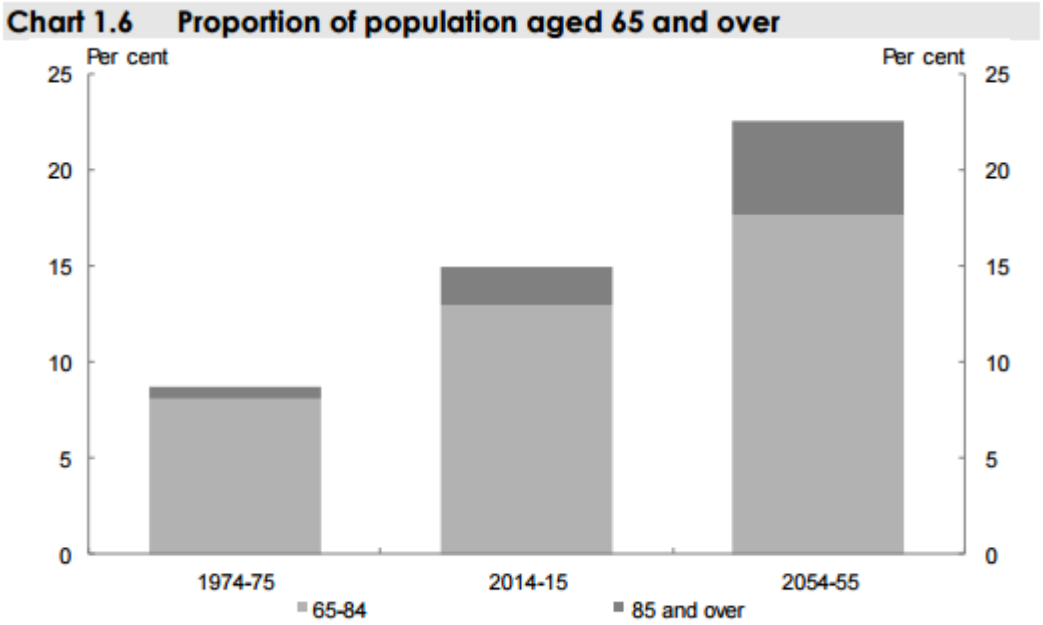
Social environment is more important than the physical environment for predicting older adults´ social interactions

Key Findings - 2

Important (neighbourhood) “third places” for predicting older adults´ social interactions are:

- Cafes/bars/restaurants
- Shops
- Natural environment
- Public open spaces, and
- Footpaths

Challenges of an Ageing Society

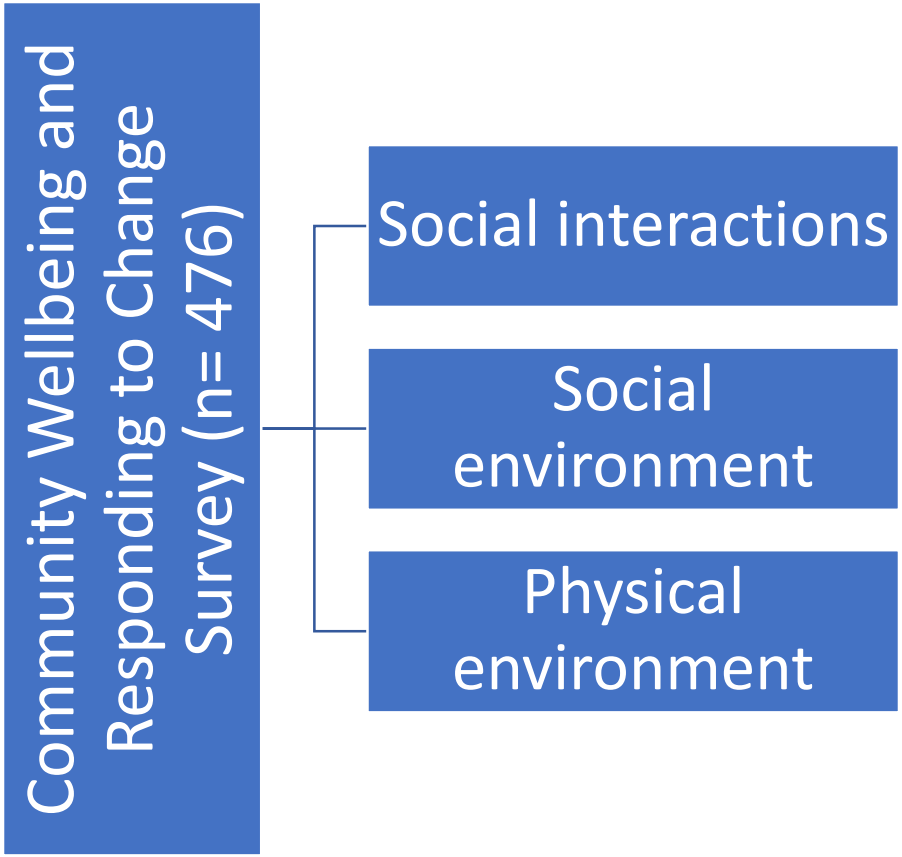


Face-to-face social interactions reduce loneliness and increase wellbeing of older adults

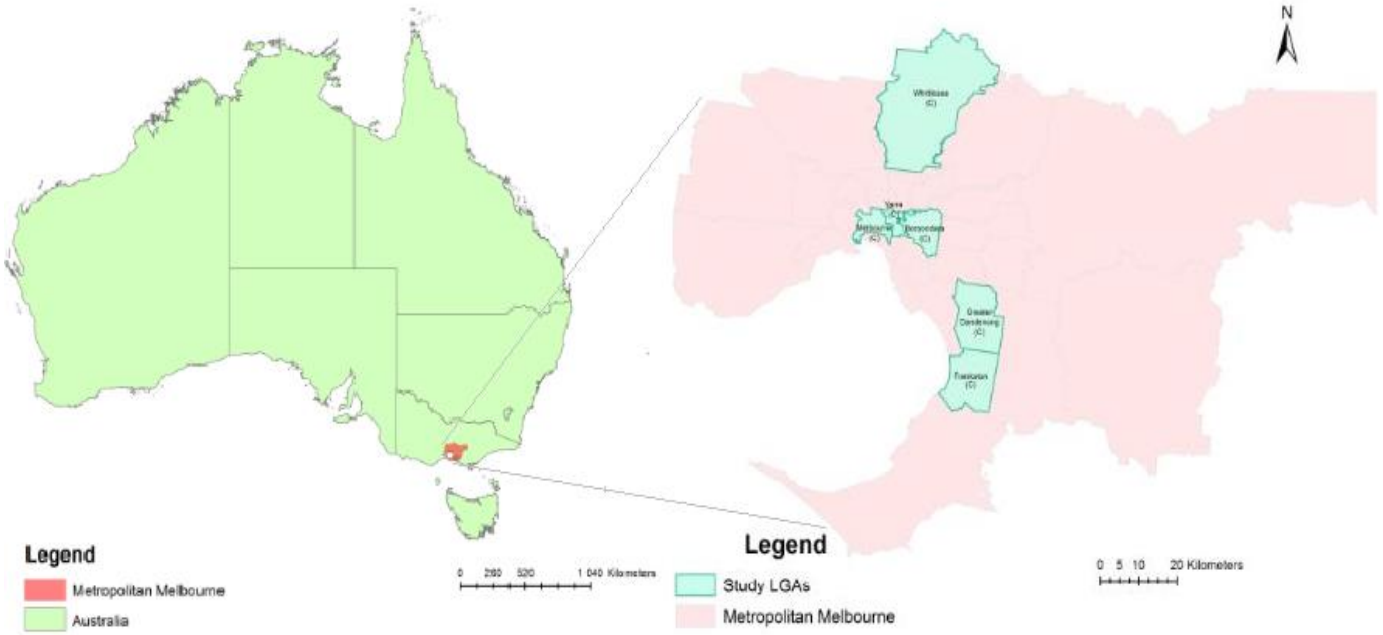
Social and Physical Environments

Importace of social and physical evironment?

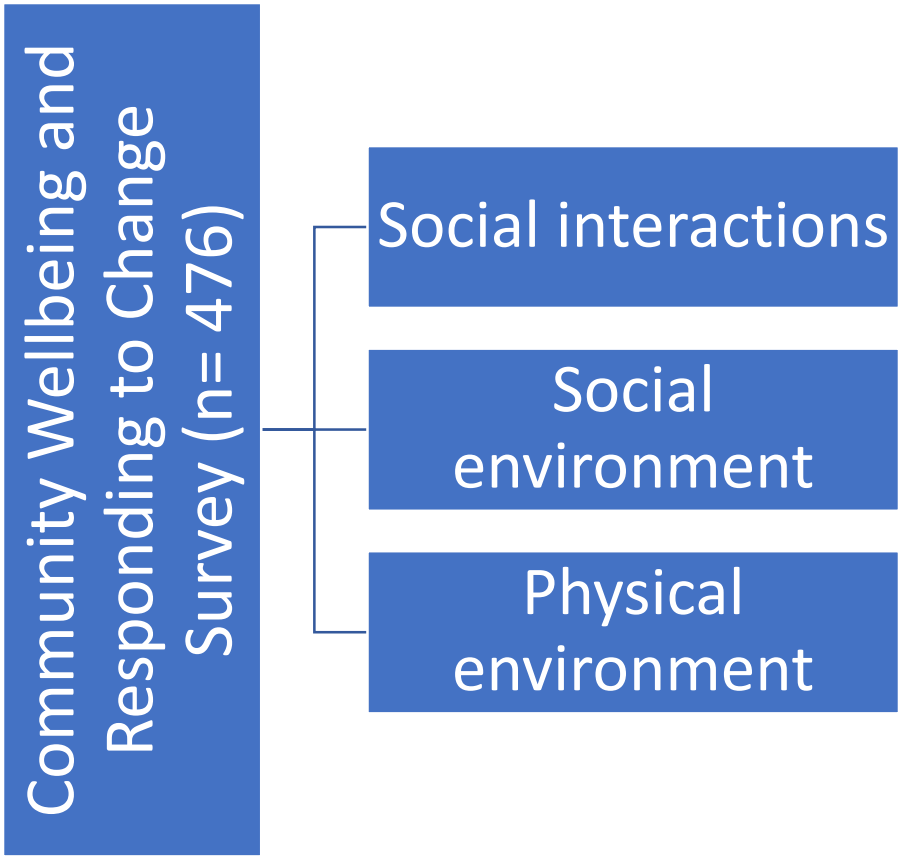
Methodology



Methodology



Methodology



- Multiple regression analysis

Survey Results

- 56.7% 65 years old or older
- 52.5% female
- 57.6% retired
- 88.7% homeowners
- 67.8% lived in separate house
- Majority were very satisfied or satisfied with their physical mobility (81.3%) and health (74.0%)
- Respondents spent 5.3 days (during daytime) in and around their suburb

Survey Results

- Majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their social and physical environment (means of the measures > 3)
- Community wellbeing had a mean of 4.3
- 81.0% of older adults strongly agreed or agreed that their suburb was suitable for older adults

H1: Higher perception of the **social environment** is positively associated with greater amount of frequency of local social interactions

Significant?

Measure	R-squared	Change in R^2	p-value
Safety	0.0575		0.54
Participation in community groups	0.1985	0.141	0.00 ✓
Community wellbeing	0.3049	0.106	0.00 ✓
Community spirit	0.3975	0.093	0.00 ✓
Community inclusion	0.4059	0.008	0.12
Levels of trust	0.4042	-0.002	0.19

H2: Higher perceptions of the **local (physical) environment** is positively associated with greater amount of local social interactions

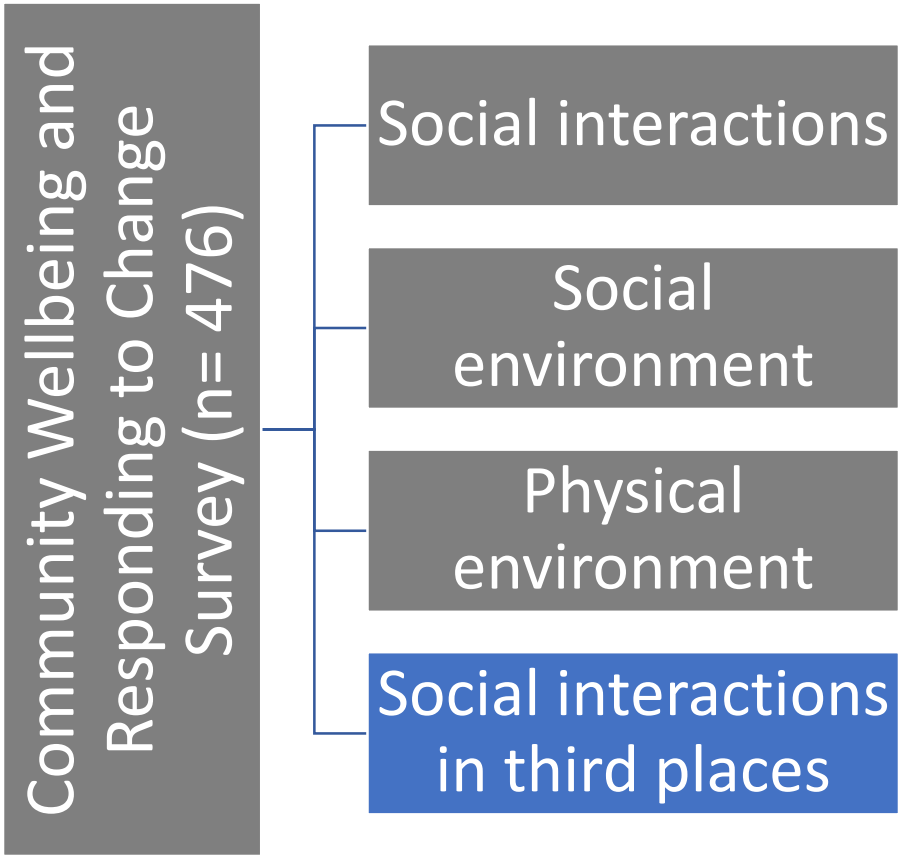
Significant?

Measure	R-squared	Change in R2	p-value
General appearance	0.4049	0.0007	0.40
General environment	0.4054	0.0005	0.35
Density	0.4022	-0.0032	0.97
Mix	0.4026	-0.0028	0.70
Access	0.4023	-0.0031	0.95

Third Places for Social Interactions

Are Third Places positively associated with more frequent social interactions?

Methodology – Extend Multiple Regression Analyses



H3: Higher perceptions of **social interactions in third places** are positively associated with more frequent social interactions

Significant?

Third place	R-squared	Change in R2	p-value
Cafes/bars/restaurants	0.4370	0.0347	0.000 ✓
Shops	0.4520	0.015	0.002 ✓
Natural environment	0.4601	0.0081	0.003 ✓
Public open space	0.4676	0.0075	0.018 ✓
Community places	0.4723	0.0047	0.121
Services	0.4708	-0.0015	0.769
Public transport stops	0.4744	0.0036	0.844
Footpaths	0.4888	0.0144	0.001 ✓

Discussion

- **H1**: Participation in community groups and safety
- **H2**: Perceived physical enviornment had minimal impact for social interactions
- **H3**: Community places, services and public transport stops were not significant for predicting social interactions in Melbourne

Conclusions

- Perceived social environment is relatively more important than physical environment for predicting older adults´ social interactions
- But neighbourhood third places, such as cafes/bars/restaurants, shops, natural environment, public open spaces and footpaths are important for older adults´ social interactions

Future Work

- The role of physical environment needs further investigation – next phase of this study
- Digital communication and social media aspect also needs further investigation

Thank you