

The lived experience of frailty: finding meaning

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Frailty has attracted increasing interest in the last decade and is now described as 'a geriatric syndrome that arises due to multiple deficits to body systems' (McPhee et al 2016 p. 569). As yet, little research has focused on the experience of frailty from older people's standpoint, particularly from a spiritual perspective. When attention is directed only to deficits in frailty, the reality of life for older people may be misconstrued, and the importance of meaning in their lives missed.

This paper reports on a two-stage study of the lived experience of people living with frailty, aged between 70 and 102: an initial qualitative study and an extended mixed methods project, from different cultures and religious faiths (and none), using in-depth interviews and psychometric tests (socio-demographic; Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002); Self-Transcendence Scale (Reed, 1986); Geriatric Depression Scale – Short Form (Sheik & Yesavage, 1986); Self-Rated Physical and Mental Health (Hays, 1998); and Katz Index of ADL (Katz, Down, Cash & Grotz, 1970)). Applying a model of spiritual process and tasks of ageing (MacKinlay 1998, 2006, 2017; MacKinlay & Trevitt 2012), through participants' narratives, topics explored include: the lived experience of frailty, sources of meaning and inner strength in frailty, religious, spiritual and emotional supports participants wish to engage with, and current hopes and joy. This paper addresses the research process and findings of the study.

The project identifies what older people themselves regard as vitally important for wellbeing in frailty. In turn, this can inform care modalities in assisting and empowering older people to find meaning when frail, and design new models of spiritual growth and care, taking into account the increasing secularisation of society in Australia, in line with the new Aged Care Quality Standards (2018).