Scotland County
Community Needs Assessment for
the Aging Advisory Council Conference

Stephen M. Marson, Ph.D.
Social Work Department
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
and
Genevieve Lebeau, BS
School of Business
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

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A.B. Gibson Education Center
Introduction

The survey (found in the appendix) was adapted from an instrument provided by Pat Wolf from the Pennsylvania Methodist Conference. After many additions and deletions, the instrument was field tested at the First Presbyterian Church in Lumberton, North Carolina. A sample of eight (8) subjects between the ages of 73 and 98 completed the questionnaire. Each was interviewed regarding any difficulty they had completing the questionnaire. As a result of the field testing, additional changes were made to improve the quality of the questionnaire.

After the questionnaire was rewritten, it was distributed to Scotland County residents over the age of 60. A non probability sample\(^1\) was employed to collect the data – specifically we used a “convenience sample.” During the month of December of 2003, questionnaires were distributed throughout Scotland where subjects over the age of 60 were more likely to be found. These locations included churches, clubs, doctor’s offices, nutrition sites, the Department of Social Services, the county Health Department and other social service agencies. Residents in total institutions (nursing homes, hospitals, etc) were excluded from the sample.

Upon receiving the completed questionnaires, it was determined that 147 were usable. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was employ to tabulate and analyze the data.

The Sample

Three demographic variables were addressed. These include Age, Sex, Marital Status and Living Arrangements. Figure 1 offers an illustration of the age distribution of the sample.

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\(^1\) Regardless of the size of the non probability sample, such samples are not appropriate to be used to draw inferences or generalization about the population from which the sample has been pulled.
Based on national aging data, the sample’s age distribution is slightly less different than one would predict. After the early 70’s, we find a dramatic drop in the sample followed by a dramatic increase in the sample for the early 80’s. The drop in the frequency distribution after the early 80’s is expected, but usually the flow slopes gradually rather than dramatically.

Figure 2 includes the sex distribution. Unlike the age distribution, the sex distribution follows a pattern similar to the national trend. Women have longer life expectancies than men. Within nursing homes, for example, it is common to see three (3) women for one (1) man. Interestingly, the Scotland County sample is consistent with this trend,
Figure 2 illustrates the distribution for Marital Status. Again, here there is no surprise. The data fits well with national trends.

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution for Marital Status. Again, here there is no surprise. The data fits well with national trends.

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Examining demographic trends for non probability samples are important because such analysis enables the reader and researcher to contrast the sample to the census data. The more similar a sample distribution is to the population distribution, the more confident one can be in drawing inferences.
The Findings

In an era of limited funding for social service, we must address issues that establish priorities. Several questions were asked. The first of these included, “with whom are you living?” The results can be found in Figure 4.

Surprisingly, the largest percentage (42.2%) of the sample live in solitude (n = 62). Approximately, 33% live with a spouse (n = 49). A total of 84 or 57.8% of the sample do not live in isolation. Those who live alone are the most vulnerable portion of the sample. As a result, the focus will be placed on them.

As an overview, four pieces of data were collected: Level of problems in living arrangements, Facing an emergency, Rating of health, and Prescription drug problems (this lists 4 pieces of data). The results can be found in Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8.
Figure 5 clearly illustrates that the people who are living alone tend to be more content than the ones living with others. However, when subjects had serious problems, those who live alone were considerably more disparate for wanting a change.

Figure 6 illustrates that subjects who live alone have a slightly better idea or options on what to do in a medical emergency. Those living alone have a greater need to care for themselves and therefore must not depend on others to serve as a liaisons for acquiring needed services – particularly health care.
The most disturbing finding is found in Figure 7. Here we see that the subjects who are most vulnerable (those living alone) also demonstrate a pattern of having poorer health. Elders who are not living in isolation are 2 to 1 more likely to have Excellent Health. In fact, isolated elders
in Scotland County are exhibiting “healthy” findings only in the category of “Very Good Health.” In all other areas, they lag behind senior citizens who live with others. Could living in isolation be a cause of poorer physical health?

Figures 8 and 9 illustrate nearly identical results. Those living in isolations have about the same chance of having a doctor as those living with someone else. Those living with others

![Figure 8](image)

**Figure 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Have a Doctor?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Living Alone</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

are slightly better off in terms of access to medication. However, data from Figure 9 requires more in-depth analysis. Logic seems to suggest that senior citizens who do not have funds to pay for prescription drugs would be in much worse situation than those who are living with someone else. Those who live with someone else have a better chance to have a back-up plan. In addition, someone is available to help out when one cannot serve their own needs because medications are unavailable.

Specific areas of needs were addressed and assessed. These include the issues that can be found in Figure 10. The items in Figure 10 are divided into three areas. These include:
Figure 9

Enough money for medications?

Living Alone | Not Living Alone
---|---
Yes | No

Figure 10

Needs of Subjects

- Church Membership
- Transportation
- Grocery Shopping
- Changing fire alarm batteries
- Changing ceiling lights
- Lawn care/cutting grass
- Minor household repairs
- Occasional light housekeeping
- Food/Meal preparation
- Moving heavy objects
- Installing windows/door locks
- Help in organizing/managing my checkbook/finances
- Regular phone calls (Buddy System)
- Regular friendly visits
- Receiving notes, letters, and cards
- Hearing from other while I recuperate
- Help fill out Medicare/Insurance forms
- Occasional legal assistance
- Occasional financial/tax assistance
- Having someone to go shopping/sightseeing
- Help in getting health services

- Help in selecting a nursing home
- Having a live-in companion occasionally
- Having a live-in companion regularly
- Relief for a caregiver
- Having an adult day care center
- Classes on health issues
- Classes on financial planning/investments
- Classes on coping with loss/death/loneliness
- Classes on planning or being retired
- Classes on home safety/fire prevention
- Classes on about the Bible
- Prayer group
- Field visits (interesting places to visit)
- Meeting with other who share an interest
- Book club
- Coffee Club
- Travel group
- Support group
- Exercise/Aerobic
- Classes on cooking/nutrition
- Classes on avoiding fraud/scams
• Needs
• Surprising results
• No difference
• No problem

“Needs” are identified in Figure 10 with bold print. By needs, we mean the there is either a greater need for elder who live in isolation or there is a need for the entire sample. “Surprising results” are placed in italics. Surprising results do not necessarily mean that no needs exist. For example, sometimes it means that subjects living in isolation do not have a need in that area while the subject not living alone have a great need. Items that are identified as “no difference” are underlined. Here again, the underlining does not necessarily mean that there is no need or problem, rather it suggest that those living in isolation are not different from those living with someone else. Items that have been identified as being “no problem,” have no characteristic within the font. These items may be problematic for a minority of the sample. However, this does not suggest that it is not a serious problem for those who identified it as an issue of concern.

The next sections provide the comparisons for the categories illustrated in Figure 10. “Needs” are illustrated first, followed by “Surprising Results,” then “No difference” and lastly “No problem”.
Needs

**Figure 11**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of people who can help others, neither need help, and need help with fire alarm batteries, comparing living alone and not living alone.]

**Figure 12**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of people who can help others, neither need help, and need help with changing lights, comparing living alone and not living alone.]

Living Alone
Not Living Alone
Figure 13

Lawn Care?

Percent

0 10 20 30 40 50 60

Can help Others Neither Need help

Living Alone Not Living Alone

Figure 14

Home Repairs?

Percent

0 20 40 60 80

Can help Others Neither Need help

Living Alone Not Living Alone
Figure 17

Need phone calls from buddy?

Living Alone  Not Living Alone

Figure 18

Need Friendly Visits?

Living Alone  Not Living Alone
Figure 19

Visitors while recuperating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitors while recuperating</th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20

Help with Health Forms?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help with Health Forms?</th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 23

Help with getting Health Services?

- Can help Others
- Neither
- Need help

Living Alone Not Living Alone

Figure 24

Need Live-in Companion-Occasionally?

- Can help Others
- Neither
- Need help

Living Alone Not Living Alone
Figure 27

Need Classes on Health Issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28

Need Classes on financial Issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 29

Class on Coping with Death?

Percent

Can help Others  Neither  Need help

Living Alone  Not Living Alone

Figure 30

Retirement Classes?

Percent

Can help Others  Neither  Need help

Living Alone  Not Living Alone
**Surprising Results**

Surprising results constitute outcomes from the survey that were unexpected. Surprising results do *not* suggest that needs do not exist, it merely means that the results do not make theoretical or practical sense. Statistically, some of these outcomes may constitute what is known as a type one error. In any case, these results need to be examined.

![Figure 35](image1.png)

**Transportation a Problem?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 36](image2.png)

**Grocery Shopping a Problem?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 37

Check with Checkbook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 38

Need Friend for Sightseeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 42

![Chart showing the percentage of people living alone and not living alone in relation to their need for a support group.]

Figure 43

![Chart showing the percentage of people living alone and not living alone in relation to their need for a cook or nutrition class.]

Living Alone  Not Living Alone
Figure 44

Help Avoiding Scams?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help</th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 45

Need more info about Nursing Homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need more info</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 46

Need more info about Help Others Read

Percent

Yes
No

Figure 47

Need more info about Welcoming Neighbors

Percent

Yes
No
No Difference

The following figures illustrate data in which there was no difference between those who lived in isolation and those subjects that had someone living with them. As in the case of the “Surprise” data, this category does not suggest a lack of need, it merely suggests that the needs are within 10 percentage points between the two groups.
In my mind, Figure 51 represents the most shocking data within this entire paper. Ninety percent (90%) of the subjects are members of local churches. Sixty percent (60%) of the subjects indicated a need for a Bible study class. Local churches are not doing an adequate job in this area.
Figure 52

Need Bible Class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>Need Bible Class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 53

Need a Coffee Club?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>Need a Coffee Club?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31
Figure 54

Want a Travel Group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 55

Need Exercise Guidance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Living Alone</th>
<th>Not Living Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can help Others</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No Problem

Figure 58 represents the only issue identified as “no problem” – church member. Over 90% of the sample (both those living in isolation and those living with others) claim church membership. As a result, the data is not separated.
Conclusion and Recommendation

The data represents a nonprobability sample derived from a survey taken during December of 2003. Upon receiving the completed questionnaires, it was determined that 147 were usable. The largest percentage (42.2%) of the sample live in solitude (n = 62). Approximately, 33% live with a spouse (n = 49). A total of 84 or 57.8% of the sample do not live in isolation. Those who live alone are the most vulnerable portion of the sample. As a result, this presentation focused on contrasting subjects who live in isolation with subject who do not live in isolation. The major limitation of this presentation is that the reader must be cautious in making generalizations about the entire population of Scotland County elders. Non probability samples do not offer that option. Such samples require a great deal of money which was simply not available.

However, some recommendation can be made. These include:

- The identified needs should be ranked in terms of priorities and cost.
• Once identified as a need, the issue should be presented to an agency or institution that is best suited to address the need. For example, if 60% of the sample indicated a need to have a Bible study group and 90% of the sample claims church membership, local ministers should address this issue.

• When collecting additional information or when interviewing elderly individuals, one needs to inquire if the person lives alone.

• Data indicates that the many subjects in the sample have a need to reciprocate. This is a characteristic of the Depression Era cohort. They often feel guilty if they are not also giving. In every area, there were those who were interested in helping others. This is an important untapped resource for the county.

An additional issue that should be addressed is the special needs of the old-old – those over 85. Data from other sources suggest that this age category is in the greatest need. They are particularly vulnerable if they live in isolation.