

CHANGES IN FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY IN OLDER ADULTS LIVING ALONE: A THREE-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY IN A RURAL AREA OF JAPAN

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Objective The purposes of this research were to clarify three-year changes in functional capacity and to investigate related physical health, psychological/mental health, and social health factors in older adults living alone in a rural area of Japan.

Methods Home visit interviews were conducted in 2000 (the baseline survey: n = 128) and in 2003 (the follow-up survey: n = 101) with older adults living alone in a town in Ishikawa prefecture. Seventy nine subjects were analyzed using logistic regression analysis at the follow-up survey.

Results Of these 79 subjects, 40 persons had scores for functional capacity decreased by one or more points, the "Lowered" group (50.6%), while 27 persons were "Unchanged" (34.2%), and 12 persons were "Improved" (15.2%). Factors at the baseline survey were compared between the "Lowered" group and the "Unchanged/Improved" group. Significant factors that caused a decreased functional capacity were age (75 years old and over), no participation in social activities, and contact with friends/neighbors over the phone less than once a week.

Conclusion This research has shown that participation in social activities and contact with friends/neighbors maintain a higher functional capacity in older adults living alone.

Key words : aged, functional capacity, living alone, longitudinal study, quality of life

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