

Presented July 28, 2004, at American Psychological Association
2004 Annual Meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii

Women's Perceptions of Aging: Fears, Preferences and Concerns

Nancy D. O'Reilly, Psy. D.

President & CEO, O'Reilly Health & Wellness Consultation Services, L.L.C.

R. Paul Thomlinson, Ph. D.

Vice-president—Research and Quality Assurance, Burrell Behavioral Health

Margaret U. Castrey, B. A.

President, Margaret Castrey & Associates

www.womenspeak.com

ABSTRACT

1,000 Women Revealed Perceptions about Aging

Nearly Half of Women Feared Getting Older

- Fearful women had:
 - ~ More health concerns
 - ~ More abdominal concerns
 - ~ More concern about appearance
- Average fear onset within previous 10 years
- Age cohort 20-29 most fearful

Majority Confident in Self-care Ability

- Age cohort 40-49 most confident in self-care ability
- Fearful women less confident in future self-care ability

Two Top Aging Concerns

- Health
- Money
- Concerns differ significantly by age & marital status

Introduction

Girls now have one-in-three chance of living to 100.
Little research to date explores women's perceptions of aging.
Attitudes & perceptions greatly affect life experience.

Research Questions

1. What are women's major concerns about getting older?
2. What factors affect a woman's confidence in self-care ability?
3. Do their perceptions & concerns differ by demographics or by fear of getting older?

Method

Sample

- 1,000 healthy, physically active women
- Average age 41 years (range 18 to 86)

Self-report Survey

- Paper-and-pencil inventories
- Internet version

Ongoing Web-based Research

- Current survey focuses on women's fears of aging
- Available on www.womenspeak.com

Results

Nearly Half Feared Getting Older

- Fearful women ($n = 451$) had significantly:
 - ~ More overall health concerns
 - ~ More abdominal problems
- Women aged 20-29 were most fearful; ages 70+ were least fearful
- Separated & never-married women more fearful
- On average, fear began in previous 10 years

Confidence in Self-care Ability

- Women in their 40s and 60s were most confident
- Confidence declines the farther into the future they look
- Fearful women significantly less confident of self-care ability
- Separated and widowed women less confident than the others
- Self-employed women most confident at all time projections

Women's Aging Concerns

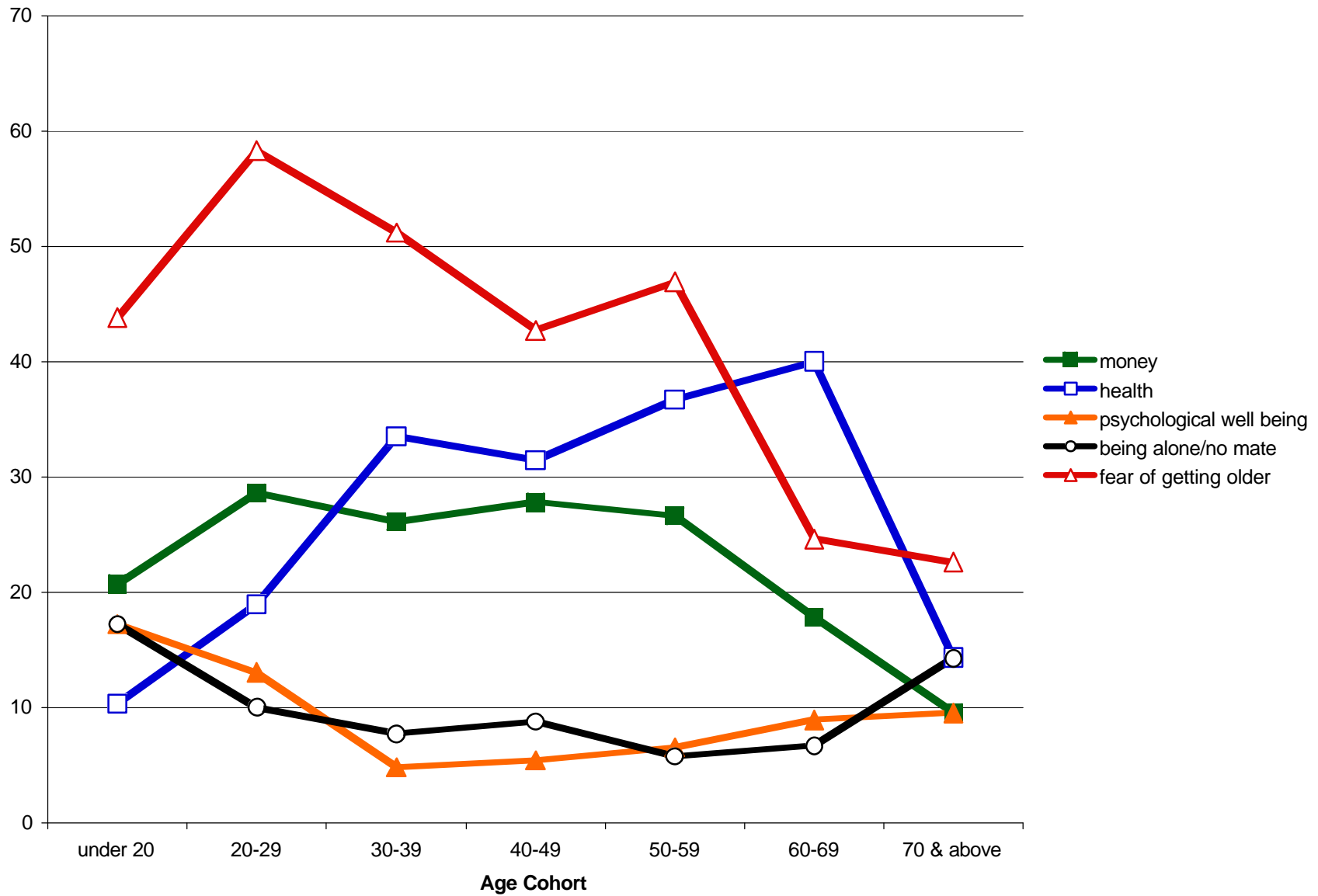
- Aging concerns differed significantly by age and marital status
- Striking differences in concerns by age cohort

Percentage Citing This Major Concern

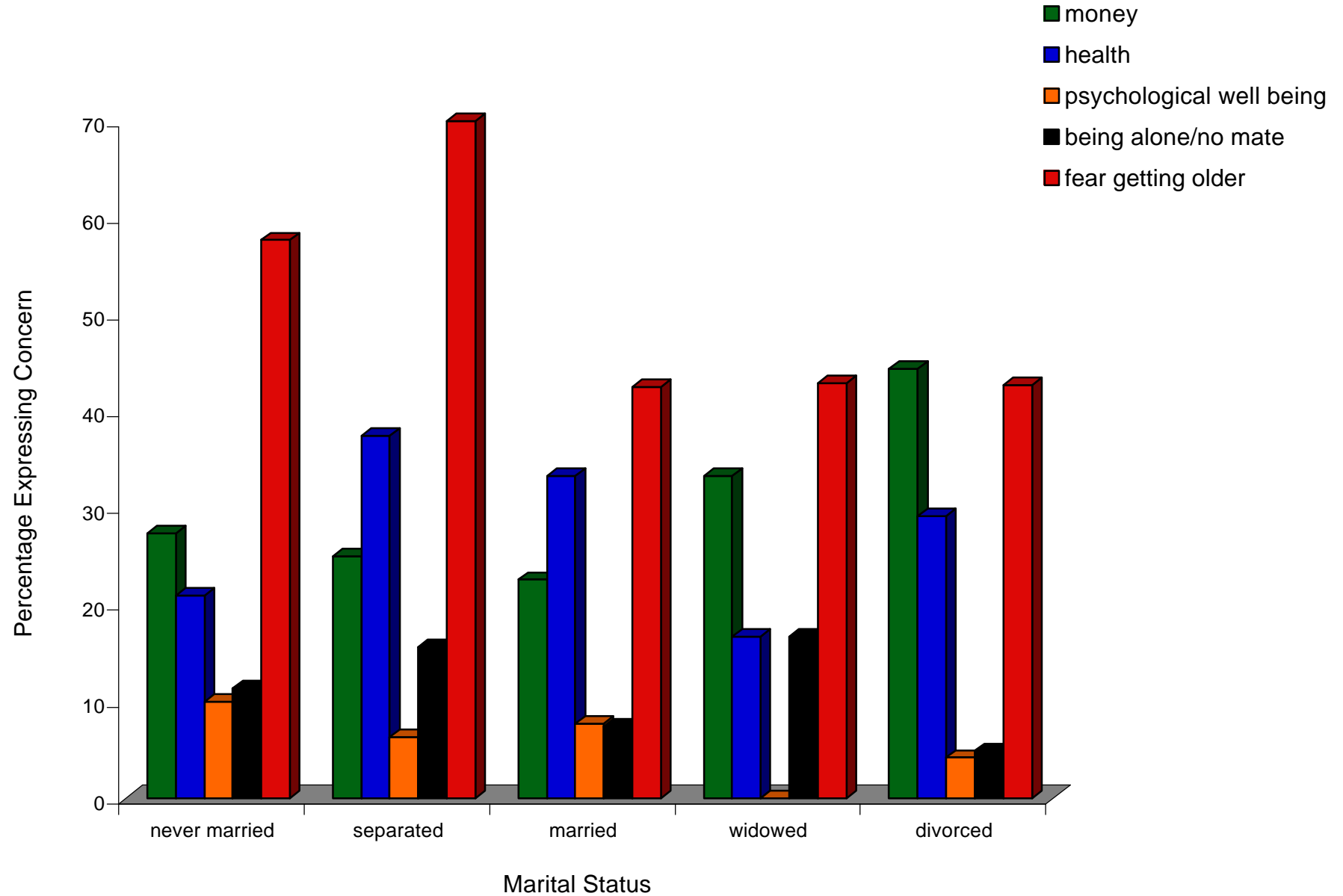
	%
Having health problems	29.4
Not having enough money	26.0
Being alone	10.1
Loss of psychological/emotional well-being	7.8
Not having a mate	7.1
Financial ignorance	2.4
Having a spiritual void	4.7
Fear of dying	4.1
Losing youthful physical appearance	4.1
Society's view of you as an aging citizen	2.8
Other	1.4

N = 1,000

Fear of Aging & Major Aging Concerns by Age Cohort



Fear of Aging & Major Aging Concerns by Marital Status



Conclusions

- Women may hesitate to discuss fears and concerns about aging.
- Fear of getting older may indicate other concerns & health issues.
- Lack of confidence in self-care ability may underlie other anxieties.
- Development of aging fear in past decade raises questions about societal causes.
- Caregivers can help women process their fears and develop positive self-perceptions of aging.
- On-going web-based research may reveal fear causes and solutions.
- Full research available at www.womenspeak.com.