

What we could learn from older men - three studies in Estonia

Reeli Sirotkina

lecturer

Tallinn University/University of Tartu

Antenarrative

- ERASMUS+ project “Old Guys say “yes” to the Community” - 96 interviews in Estonia but East Estonia in particular-experience to listen 60+ stories
- Portuguese team presentation in Faro - when men say they don't want anything or answer to the question “do you have ideas where you would like to participate?”- answer in “nothing”
- Interreg project “ComeStrong” - to empower men - peer to peer activities; intensive and active project to find, invite, recruit men - to communicate, listen, motivate, advocate
- Felika Tuul MA thesis Experiences of ageing of elderly men in Estonia based on life narratives
- Olga Lupanova's BA thesis "But Where to Participate?": Experiences of Social Participation among Men Who Are Older Than 60
- Margit Metsmägin's MA thesis “Older men experiences about leisure time activities in community”

3 researches aiming at...

- to describe the social participation experiences of men who are over 60 years old
- to create new knowledge on Estonian senior men's experiences in filling up free time
- to create new knowledge of how elderly men in Estonia interpret their experiences of ageing.

Theoretical background

- Narrative foreclosure - person does not believe in new experiences, interpretations and stops narrative creation process, i.e. people who don't have aims, don't believe in future (Bohlmeijer et al 2010) but also other people can help to narrative foreclosure telling how to live, who and what is important (Randall, McKim, 2008). Narrative foreclosure is influenced by stereotypes and discourses about how older people should behave, should have or not have etc.
- Masculinity - during the life span social life is gendered - we assume how men or women need to behave (individualistic activities) but we don't take into account age. While we age we can lose meaningful contacts.

Theoretical background

Taxonomy of social activities

- First level activities (individualistic) like eating, observing media and political news
 - Second level (individualistic) has same activities but person does them in parallel with others like walking, eating, visiting a shop, cinema
 - Third level (collective) sharing activities with others, asking help, visiting cinema or theatre
 - Fourth level doing something with meaningful person
 - Fifth level helping somebody personally
 - Sixth level giving something to the community, society i.e. working
- 3-6 are social participation; 5 and 6 are social engagement

Results

- A person's whole life span affects how he adjusts with ageing
- Main topics that arose in the elderly men's narratives were childhood, education and career, communication, relationships and health
- Positive ability to adjust to life changes in later life is supported by the ability to focus on strengths, to have realistic view on life, spirituality, high level of autonomy, positive look on life.
- Men who are active perceive the benefits of social participation - society doesn't notice their participation
- Main obstacle to social participation is ageism- they are excluded from labour market and activities for them does not exist
- Men under the age of 75 feel themselves too old in the eyes of society but too young to be involved with the associations of elderly
- Men leisure activities tend to be individual and domestic type.
- Leader is needed to organise group activities.

Thoughts about the research process

- Ageism - that determines much in micro-, meso- and macro level; main aim is to notice ageist attitudes, stereotypes and do not reproduce them
- Participation(ism) as an ideology - like the Netherland - they don't use anymore welfarist model but participationist model to describe state social policy (but not only); questions about barriers (also ageist)
- Mental health - how to maintain positive attitude, prevent loneliness, find friends, talk to somebody (not only contacts but meaningful relationships)
- Target group should be broad - ComeStrong has target to recruit men 45-75. Also men could be younger and older-age limits are not important. Why? It seems that ageist attitudes are internalised shortly after retirement and to be more resilient toward ageism you need to start earlier
- Grass-root level activities are supported by other grass-root level activists
- Men's Shed movement is very universal and fits to all countries - we keep in contact with UK MS leader

Activities so far...

- Men's Garage movement
- Meetings with men - every time more men. Three meetings - 4 -7-10
- Recruitment, dissemination - article in 60+ magazine
https://60pluss.postimees.ee/4435661/enesekindel-mees-ei-vota-vanust-hinge?_ga=2.50380649.1991120407.1526876863-1465144756.1524414923
- Third age university - 400 people participated lecture
- FB account in English and Estonian language
- To have Men's Garage own place -

Tiigi community house - rooms are free from June (garden, kitchen, low rent)

Reflecting on the whole story

- Older men understand positive effects of social participation
- They don't like mentally and physically passive lifestyle
- They don't like heavy alcohol consumption
- Internalisation of negative stereotypes is neither conscious nor their free choice
- BUT the result of implicit ageism

How to proceed?

- Being aware of your own prejudices and stereotypes - in social work we talk about advocacy - bringing forward the groups (their world) that are not fully recognised, seen or/and engaged into community, society - <https://www.facebook.com/comestrongproject/>
- Write, talk and spread our experiences - we have written in 60+ newspaper, journal “Social work”, talked to Tartu city government, engaged Mayor of Tartu to be a steering group member of ComeStrong project, ESWRA conference and membership in special interest group of European Network of Gerontological Social Work -Routledge wants a book from SIG. Discussion is about the book itself.