

Influences on elderly quality of life: age and identity



Many influences affect older people's quality of life in the 21st century and there are changes in expectations both by and about older people in terms of identity and pressure to 'age well'.

The following will discuss and evaluate the many influences, which affect older people's quality of life in the 21st century. The evaluation will also discuss the changes in expectations both by and about older people in terms of their identity and the pressure to age well. As will be demonstrated there are many diverse influences that affect older people's quality of life ranging from government policies, non-governmental organisations representing their interests, prevailing demographic trends, as well as the provisions for retirement which the older people may or may not have made for themselves. The quality of life for older people is also influenced and to a large extent dependent upon the availability of health, housing, and social services. Non-governmental organisations have an important role in altering the expectations of older people in terms of their identity, and the pressure to age well. The value of occupational and state pensions as well as the potentially high costs of having to be cared for are as will be shown a significant concern for older people when it comes to their quality of life.

Government policies can and do have a major influence upon the quality of life of older people. The government could also alter the expectations that older people have in terms of their identities and any pressure to age well, which can be an integral part of government and public sector policies towards older people. This was a small document issued by the Better Government for Older People group to discuss the challenges that older

people face. It is a good overview of the issues involved (Audit Commission / <https://assignbuster.com/influences-on-elderly-quality-of-life-age-and-identity/>)

Better Government for Older People, p. 2). Governments have to consider the cost of state pensions, other social security benefits, as well as the cost of health and social services (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, May 2004 p. 9). Demographic trends will also have a significant factor in the provision of government social security payments and public services to older people. The increasing numbers of older people within the population mean that people need to pay higher national insurance contributions and taxes whilst they are working to cover extra public expenditure caused by the higher costs that an ageing population brings with it (Vincent et al, 2006). As another way of reducing the strain on social security and public service budgets the government has also changed employment law to allow older people to carry on working past the state retirement age. Already the government has changed services and the help directed towards older people to improve their health and to reduce levels of poverty, i. e. the introduction of NHS Direct and Pension Credit. The whole of the House of Commons report contains very useful information concerning the policy decisions needed to help older people in Britain. The report provides analysis of the successes and the shortcomings of present public policies towards older people. On balance chapters 3 and 4 contained the most relevant information (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, May 2004 p. 9).

Ultimately the government would more than likely increase the state retirement age so that older people in the future have longer working lives to pay towards their state retirement pensions (Brooke and Taylor, 2005).

Allowing older people to work longer also compensates for the declining

number of young people in the population that are paying taxes and national insurance contributions to provide social security payments and public services. When it comes to social security and public service expenditure governments have attempted to save costs by rationing or restricting services, as well as making older people with greater levels of savings or their own homes pay for such services. For instance, older people who own their houses are liable to sell those homes to pay for long-term stays in residential care homes. That practice has now been reduced nationally due to devolution in Scotland and Wales. The Department of Health report is a useful analysis of the current provision of medical services to older people, as well as outlining the options for improving the level of healthcare provision in the future. There is also some useful information in the appendices (Department of Health, 2006). New Labour has attempted to reorganise government structures to target services towards older people more effectively. For instance the Department for Works and Pensions has made itself more responsive to the needs of older people via the creation of the Pension Service in 2002 (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, May 2004 p. 10).

For the government and the non-governmental organisations which are interested in improving or at least maintaining the quality of life for older people there are social as well as economic reasons for allowing and encouraging older people to carry on working past the state retirement age. Non-governmental organisations like Age Concern and Help the Aged regard the encouraging of older people to stay employed as an important means of maintaining a higher quality of life and helping older people to age well.

Older people had varying degrees of access to public services and opportunities to voice their concerns or problems. Generally older people in socially and economically deprived areas have greater needs and less influence over public services. Riseborough and Jenkins provide useful explanations as to why older people find it harder to benefit from the regeneration of deprived areas than younger people do so. Sections 3 and 4 were probably the most informative parts of this report (Riseborough & Jenkins, April 2004 p. 6). As far as non-governmental organisations are convinced that working for longer enables older people to maintain or even improve their levels of self-esteem. Older people are more prone to be excluded from improvements to public services and employment opportunities in areas that have been regenerated. Another area of concern for non-governmental organisations is that the government's consultations with older people are inconsistent nationally although it is improving on the whole (Riseborough & Jenkins, April 2004 p. 13).

Working in either a paid or voluntary capacity is a valuable method of keeping older people mentally and physically active and therefore assists them to age well. For older people themselves staying employed could also have a significant influence upon their quality of life, as it facilitates their opportunities to socialise with other older people as well as younger people. Evandrou and Glaser contend that older people could increasingly face the choice of carrying on working due to the insufficient pension levels or caring for partners or other elderly relatives (Evandrou & Glaser, 2003). Contact with younger people allows those younger people the chance to meet and understand older people, and therefore increase respect for older

generations. Both the government and the non-governmental organisations, that represent the interests of older people, have found evidence that older people find it difficult to remain employed or return to the active work force due to prejudices based on ageism against them. Aside from prejudice there might be other barriers to older people being involved in the labour market, such as a lack of training facilities or restricted access for older people with issues around their physical capabilities. To a large extent, physical barriers to older people should be significantly reduced by the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. That Act requires equal access to work places and the provision of public or private services irrespective of disability and of age (Audit Commission / Better Government for Older People, p. 2).

The concept of establishing identities and ageing well depends on more than just the prospects of older people wishing to work for longer. Estes et al are in parts highly critical of present public services for older people, whilst the first couple of chapters provide valuable insights into the way older people are generally inadequately catered for (Estes et al, 2003). The desire of older people to work and remain active for longer is influenced by what they want out life themselves as well as by the influence of the government and non-governmental organisations. Older people have an influence upon the ideas and the policies of the government and non-governmental organisations towards them. Older people are often an essential part of the non-governmental organisations that they belong to, and who represent their interests. Non-governmental organisations will attempt to help older people to establish their identity and advise them how to age well due to older people requesting such assistance in the first place. Older people will use

non-governmental organisations to lobby the government to change governmental policies to suit their best interests when it comes to a high quality of life, an identity that enables self-esteem and enhances the prospects of ageing well. It is not governments that older people and their associated non-governmental organisations attempt to lobby, they frequently use the media to publicise their opinions or advice. Of course the influence that older people have upon government policy should logically increase throughout the 21st century as the population continues to age and the government will need older people to work longer and stay healthy for longer. As older people will make up an ever-greater percentage of the electorate the political parties that do the most to improve the quality of life older people could have the best prospects of winning general elections. In return governments will have to assist older people by making it easier to remain employed and healthy for longer as well as reducing the incidence of ageism. Reducing the doubts that people have concerning the abilities of older people is vital if prejudices are not going to prevent the expectations of older people that the quality of their lives will be improved. The majority of the report by Bowers et al is critical of the failure of public policy to assist older people with mental health problems. The report frequently mentions the positive influence that non-governmental organisations do have upon the quality of life for older people and raising their expectations (Bowers et al, 2005 p. 25).

To conclude the quality of life of older people, with closely linked expectations of identity and ageing well will be and is currently influenced by government policy, the actions of the non-governmental organisations that

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are interested in older people, and the media. Governments will argue that the best way for older people to achieve a high quality of life is for them to help themselves by working as long as possible. Governments are encouraging people to plan for their own retirement in terms of adequate income levels, and advising them of the all public services, which are available to help them. Urging people to stay employed not only prevents older people from living in poverty it raises expectations of being identified as being useful and active members of society that have self-esteem and who are respected by younger people. Governments have an important influence by demonstrating to society as a whole the valuable contribution that older people make to the social and economic quality of life for every body and not just for older people. Non-governmental organisations that help older people also have a strong influence over the quality of life, plus the expectations of identity and ageing well for older people. In a sense non-governmental organisations are essential for older people to gain the help and the advice they need to have a high quality of life whilst advising governments of the social and economic policies which will improve the lives of older people.

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