TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

Involving older people in co-producing knowledge about age-friendly neighbourhood interventions

BACKGROUND

Developing what has been termed ‘age-friendly’ cities has become a significant issue for public policy. By 2030, two-thirds of the world’s population will reside in cities, with - for urban areas in high income countries - at least one-quarter of their populations aged 60 and over. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) ‘Age-Friendly Cities’ project (2007) emphasises the theme of developing supportive urban environments for older citizens. The WHO established in 2010 the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities (AFC) to assist implementation of policy recommendations arising from the project. Currently, the network has a membership of 287 cities and communities across countries in the Global North and South. The AFC model has been influential in raising awareness about the need to prioritise the role of older people in developing and action plans to improve the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood.

To date, however, there is inadequate conceptualisation of models of co-production relevant to this area of work. This project directly addresses this research gap and aims to:

- Highlight the social challenges and opportunities for older people as they step beyond the traditional role of consultant to that of interviewer and researcher in examining age-friendliness.
- Promote activities that involve older people as co-researchers into mainstream social science thinking on urban development in a range of disciplines, including the arts, architecture, sociology, health sciences, and urban planning.
- Work with an existing group of older co-researchers, who were previously trained by the PI to examine the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood, to translate research findings (data collected by the co-researchers) into practice and policy recommendations that can help improve the quality of life of older people in urban neighbourhoods.
- Develop, showcase and disseminate a model of coproduction with older people which prioritises the role of older people in all stages of a research project, including the planning, design and execution phases, and ultimately, the translation of research-based evidence into policy and practice.

The project builds upon previous work which resulted in a Guide to Working with Older People as Co-Researchers [ISBN: 978-0-9576682-2-5] and a short film https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXELewHQ3do which have been mentioned as best practice examples, and promoted by the United Nations, WHO and Age Platform Europe.

METHODS

The project will utilise a participatory research approach, working with 18 older people who were trained as co-researchers to examine the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood. This was part of an EU-funded Marie Curie Fellowship. As part of this project, the co-researchers have been involved in the planning, design and conduct of 64 interviews with older people experiencing isolation and poverty in the community. This new project will work with the older co-researchers to analyse and translate research findings into practical and policy recommendations to improve the age-friendliness of neighbourhoods. The co-researchers will work with the project team to translate the research findings into co-produced outputs such as policy briefings, project summary leaflets, a practitioner-oriented article and a public engagement event.

OUTCOMES

The proposal presents a unique opportunity to link interdisciplinary academic research with practitioner and policy expertise to make a substantial difference to the quality of life of older people in cities. Outcomes will include:

- Co-producing (together with the co-researchers) 2 project summary leaflets presenting key findings from the research, one focusing on physical environmental and one focusing on social environmental issues – these aimed at the local research areas.
- Co-producing (together with the co-researchers) a policy briefing, jointly branded by Age UK and Manchester City Council, focusing on practical and policy recommendations in a style and format accessible to politicians and lay audiences.
- Co-producing a collaborative visual work emerging from an exploration of arts and heritage practice, empowering the co-researchers to convey their own narratives of memory and spatial experiences. Using photography and written-narrative work, this element will aim to extract and highlight some of the ideas/concerns expressed in the research. This will form part of the dissemination, but this output will also explore the use of arts methods in a process of self-reflection (and communication), on the part of the co-researchers.
- Providing evidence-based support to strategic commissioning of services in the city of Manchester that have an impact on the quality of life of older people

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