

MICRA – Engaging older people through participatory arts to explore the relevance of Age-friendly Cities’ domains in rural communities of NW England

Introduction

In Europe, almost a quarter of the population live in rural areas, (1) and in Western Europe, the rural population is generally more healthy than the urban population because of migration of more prosperous people to take advantage of the rural environment (2) as well as the health benefits of living in a green, less polluted environment. However, this does not describe the whole picture. In England, the rural over 65s population is higher (21%) compared to the urban population (15.3%) and 15% of rural pensioners live in poverty(3). The participation of older people in community life in rural areas is dependent on the age-friendliness of those communities.

WHO used a participatory approach to identify eight domains of Age Friendly Cities (AFC) (outdoor spaces, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, community support and health services). These domains have been developed into a set of key indicators (http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/203830/1/9789241509695_eng.pdf) that can be used to assess the age-friendliness of cities. However, there is no equivalent for rural areas.

Bringing together researchers from public health and social sciences, with particular skills in ethnographic and qualitative research, participatory art, and public engagement, this research project will use participatory arts-based, qualitative techniques to engage older people and to explore whether the AFC domains are of relevance to rural communities of NW England. The project will use innovative dissemination methods to communicate the learning and the pilot project will feed into a large scale grant application.

Aims of the project:

1. to create a novel team of interdisciplinary researchers to undertake this pilot study
2. to recruit and train a team of over 60 year old researchers from rural communities in the North West in participatory art research methods
3. to use qualitative research methods to explore and document what is important in creating age friendly rural communities
4. to compare these rural findings to those of the WHO AFC programme
5. to disseminate the findings to the local community and local/regional/national policy-makers
6. to use the findings from this pilot to apply for an NIHR RfPB grant

Methodology

Design

In this pilot study we will recruit a cohort of a minimum of ten participants from a rural setting and train them in photo-elicitation research methods, which can be used uncover what is important to participants (4) and empower them (5) in order to generate the conditions for a participant-led exploration of the theme of Age Friendly rural communities. Using this methodology, they will identify and record using digital cameras or smart phones, elements which they consider increase or reduce the age-friendliness of their own environment. Participants will come back together with their photographs to focus groups where their findings will be discussed, tested for generalisability and prioritised. The focus groups will then discuss the AFC domains and compare them with their own findings to explore the relevance of the WHO Healthy Cities priorities to rural communities in the NW England. Thematic analysis will be done and rural priorities will be mapped against AFC domains to assess for alignment and gaps. Finally, the cohort will then be involved in the production of dissemination material including a photographic exhibition and illustrated report which will be distributed to local and regional policy-makers.

Setting

The Calder Valley, West Yorkshire, has a large proportion of rural dwellers (23.5% (6) compared with GM LAs which range from Manchester with 0% (7) to Oldham with 8.4% (8). It has excellent accessibility to Manchester, with good public transport connections and where the research team has strong links to arts and community organisations.

Participants

Participants will be rural dwellers aged 60+, recruited through existing local links with arts and community organisations for older people in the Calder Valley.

Outcomes

- to create the evidence base from a user-led patient-centred perspective to inform a NIHR RfPB application
- to test out from the perspective of older people the relevance of the AFC domains in the rural setting of the NW England
- to develop a network of elderly co-researchers working alongside an interdisciplinary academic research team engaged in research which can influence policy-makers in decisions which affect the health and well-being of older people in rural communities
- to produce information for dissemination to local, regional, national and international policy-making

Deliverables

- Photo exhibition to be hosted by Calderdale Arts organisation Mytholmroyd Arts
- Illustrated report to be disseminated to local authority and MPs
- One conference presentation (British Society of Gerontology [July 2018] or International Festival of Public Health [July 2018])
- Working manuscript to be submitted to BMC Geriatrics
- Application to NIHR RfPB

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7-8
Recruit and train minimum of 10 60+ y/o researchers	Photo elicitation, Phase 1 focus groups	Analysis of data, update report to MICRA	Phase 2 Focus groups for AFC comparison. Analysis of data.	Report and exhibition preparation	Dissemination (report & exhib) manuscript production,	Utilisation of results for NIHR bid. End of project report

Project Team: **Annie Harrison**, (PI) Public Health and artist specialising in participatory art, **Dr Mel Hall** (Co-I) Education and Social Research Institute, MMU), **Dr Annemarie Money**, (Co-I) Occupational and Environmental Health, **Dr Tony Paton** (Co-I) Public Health (Previous recipient of MICRA seedcorn funding), **Megumi Rosenberg** (WHO Kobe and member of WHO AFC Indicators team), **Dr Arpana Verma** Public Health, **Prof Kate Pahl**, Education and Social Research Institute, MMU, **Paul McGarry** (To be confirmed) Strategic Lead, Age Friendly Manchester.

Budget

Staff costs	£4500
Volunteer costs including materials, travel and venues	£750
Dissemination costs including exhibition costs and printing	£750

References

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