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Ageing Equally Within Chinese Communities?

Ambition for Ageing “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by Wai Yin Society

Simpler summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by Wai Yin Society.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the findings to make places better for older people.



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Glossary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) = a Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life

Cantonese = a Chinese language spoken in southern China and Hong Kong

Communities of identity or experience = a group of people who share a common identity or experience (e.g. Bangladeshi people, LGBT people, or people living with dementia)

Data = information

GMCVO = Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, the organisation that is responsible for managing the Ambition for Ageing programme

Hakka = a minority Chinese language

Identity = your sense of your self

Interviewee = someone who is interviewed for a research project

Mainstream = catering for the majority, not specialised

Marginalised = the result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored

Minority = a group of people who are different in some way from the majority of the population

Participant = someone who takes part in a project

Sun Hui = a minority Chinese language

1. Introduction and background

Wai Yin Society

Wai Yin Society is a charity in Manchester that supports older Chinese people, and other ethnic minority communities. It runs the Sheung Lok Chinese community centre.

Older Chinese people in Manchester

The Chinese population in Manchester is one of the largest in the UK. Most older Chinese people in Manchester came to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s to work in restaurants. Many of them are now elderly and frail. The Chinese tradition is to treat elders with respect for their wisdom. If younger people do not support them then they may lose respect in their community.

There are about 14,000 Chinese people living in Manchester, about 2,000 of them speak Cantonese as their first language. Many of them do not speak English and are not able to communicate with other Chinese people who speak other Chinese languages. The language that a Chinese person speaks is related to their sense of identity.

Aims of the research

- To find out what is difficult for older Chinese people in their daily lives.
- To explore Chinese traditional beliefs and expectations about growing old and staying well, and work out how to reduce the gap between people's expectations and real life experiences.
- To investigate the gaps in services.

Summary of findings

Research participants believe that ageing well means feeling at ease 安樂, living a quiet and peaceful lifestyle 平淡; and having nothing to worry about. There are three basic requirements to make sure people are not vulnerable in old age: good health, financial security and being looked after by family. Poor health or the death of a family member or friends can have a severe impact. Language barriers can make it difficult for people to access mainstream services and create inequalities within the community. Having their own safe community space is very important.

2. Method: How Wai Yin did their research

Forty-four Chinese people aged between 59 and 99 years old took part in the research. Two thirds of the participants were women, most were aged between 60 and 89, and over two thirds came from Hong Kong. Half of the people in the focus group said they have long term health issues or are disabled.

The researchers held 35 one to one interviews, and a focus group with 10 participants (one person took part in the focus group as well as being interviewed). The project began with a workshop to raise awareness of social isolation and to recruit volunteer researchers to help with the project. The volunteers helped to recruit participants to the project.

3. Findings: What Wai Yin found out

a) Language and language barriers

More than 80% of participants usually or only speak Cantonese and prefer to speak Cantonese. Other languages spoken include Hakka, Mandarin, English, Sun Hui, and Vietnamese. Some people said they usually speak two of these. Forty one percent said they have great difficulties in communicating, and 55% say they need a lot of help. Only two people – 4% - said they are fairly comfortable or fluent in English. In the focus group people said that because of the language barrier they find it difficult to use mainstream community services. A lot of people rely on their grown up children to help communicate with doctors or get help with welfare and community services. If children live far away or someone does not have children this causes problems.

“The best way is to provide more interpreters [so] when we are ill we can say something, no need to point ... but the interpreting must be accurate [one time] I said pain and the interpreter said I had no pain!”

b) Ideas about ageing well

The research found that participants believe ‘ageing well’ means having good health, financial security, and being looked after by family. The participants talked about many Chinese cultural traditions and beliefs about how to age well, including being respected and looked after by grown up children.

However, some people feel they are only valued by their children because they help out with caring for grandchildren.

c) Independence and Loneliness

Focus group participants were keen to stress that they did not want to be a burden to their children, and wanted to remain independent. However, only half of the research participants still lived with their partners, and many people in the focus group were carers for their partners. Mobility difficulties and language barriers make it difficult for some people to participate in activities.

“The biggest enemy is loneliness. Don’t let yourself feel lonely [or] you will think too much nonsense ... this is why I have emotional problems.”



Wai Yin’s recommendations

The researchers’ recommendations are about supporting older Chinese people to improve their social networks.

- English language and IT training services should provide training that is appropriate to older Chinese people’s learning needs.
- Local service providers should work in partnership with community organisations, for example share resources with a Chinese-language counselling services.
- Health and social care organisations should develop culturally appropriate activities.

- All service providers should make sure staff are trained in cultural awareness.

4. What can we learn from this research about what makes a good place to grow older for people in minority communities?

- Older people who speak minority community languages can experience hidden language barriers that increase their social isolation even within their community.
- People who speak minority community languages are at greater risk of poor health outcomes and social isolation if they cannot access their social networks.
- People may feel more confident accessing community-specific and community-organised services. These need to be supported.

About the “Ageing Equally?” Research Programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives. Ambition for Ageing funded the ‘Ageing Equally?’ research programme to find out more about this by asking: “What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?”

More information

This is a simpler summary of the full report, which contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Wai Yin’s findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the ‘Ageing Equally?’ project reports and summaries from the Ambition for Ageing website here: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>

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