

“On Lok Wo 安樂窩 – A Safe and Happy Home” Equalities Board “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by Wai Yin Society

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.



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, Hong Kong and Macau

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

Dialect = a different form of a language spoken in one region

Equalities Board (EB) = the group responsible for making AfA inclusive and accessible for everyone

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

Hakka = a Chinese dialect

Identity = your sense of your self

Inclusion = working in such a way that marginalised and minority groups are involved and able to participate in or benefit from a programme.

Interviewee = someone who is interviewed for a research project

Mainstream = catering for the majority, not specialised

Mandarin = the main Chinese language spoken in China

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

安樂窩 On Lok Wo = a Chinese phrase that means your home, your comfort zone, a haven, or a cosy nest

養生 Yang Sheng = A Chinese philosophy about staying healthy

1. Introduction and background

Wai Yin Society

Wai Yin Society is a charity supporting Chinese people in Greater Manchester. It runs groups at Sheung Lok Centre, and Sheung Lok Radio community project.

Chinese people in Manchester

There are about 14,000 Chinese people in Manchester. Many older Chinese people do not speak much English, as they worked in Chinese community businesses as soon as they arrived in the UK, and stayed in these jobs until they retired. Some are from Hong Kong and speak Cantonese and Hakka, some are from mainland China and speak mostly Mandarin. These groups are quite separate, due to language and cultural differences, but Wai Yin supports all of them.

Aims of the research

Wai Yin wanted to find out three things to help understand what older Chinese people need to age well:

- More about traditional ideas of health and practical ways of staying well.
- Any gaps between what people need to be well, and what they can access.
- What are the language barriers for older Chinese people who speak different Chinese dialects..

Summary of findings

Older Chinese people have strong traditional ideas about how to stay well and deal with loneliness in older age, through a diet and exercise practice they call Yang Sheng 養生. They feel they can take care of themselves if the environment is supportive and they have enough money.

Language barriers, low income, and lack of confidence make it difficult to access mainstream, non-Chinese activities and services.

For older Chinese people, a place where people can age well is one where they feel accepted and looked after, and can take care of themselves.

2. Method: How Wai Yin did their research

A research team of volunteers and staff aged over 55 did 20 one-to-one interviews. The questions were based on discussions at two previous workshops for older Chinese people at Sheung Lok. The workshops were organised by the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art. The interviews were in Cantonese or Mandarin. The interviewees were aged between 55 and 81 years old. They were mostly users of the Wai Yin centres.

One of the interviewees left the project, so only 19 interviews were used in the research. Seven of these participants were male and 12 were female. 12 people came from China, six from Hong Kong, and one was from Macau, which is near Hong Kong. All of them speak a Chinese language at home. Only four use English to communicate with other people. About half of the interviewees were aged between 66 and 75 years old. Most of the interviewees were retired, a few work part-time. About half of the participants said they were disabled or had a long-term illness, none are carers.

3. Findings: What Wai Yin found out

a) Beliefs about how to age well

The research participants had strong ideas about how to stay well and deal with loneliness in older age. They call this ‘Yang Sheng’ 養生, which translates as ‘nourish life’, and refers to ways of taking care to stay healthy. You can prepare well for old age by doing your best to be physically and emotionally well through eating a good diet, taking the right kind of exercise, and having dignity, self-respect and a hopeful attitude. It is also important to keep up a social life, increase self-confidence, and contribute to the community. The participants in the study felt they could look after themselves in this way if they had enough money and a supportive environment.

b) Finding places to go and culturally relevant activities

Participants said they preferred to go to Chinese community centres to find activities and groups. This was in part because the information provided by mainstream older people’s organisations was usually in English, and they could not access it. They often did not have someone who could go with them

to support them with the language barrier. In addition, many participants were not interested in the activities at mainstream older people's centres.

Participants said they would prefer activities that are more culturally familiar, with other Chinese people, even if they spoke different Chinese dialects.

c) Communication barriers, loneliness and isolation

The interviewees said it is difficult to use non-Chinese activities and services because of language barriers, low income, and low confidence. They don't go to new places if they don't have someone to help them, because of language difficulties. One woman also felt shy with other Cantonese speakers because of her strong regional accent. These experiences cause loneliness, which makes people more isolated. It is worse for people with no partner or family.

Discussion

The researchers learned that for these older Chinese people to age well they need a place where they feel accepted and looked after, and can take care of themselves. They match this to the Chinese idea of "On Lok Wo" 安樂窩 which means a safe and happy home. Many of the participants see the Wai Yin centres as their safe and happy home.

Wai Yin's recommendations

1. There should be more research to explore what older Chinese people believe is healthy diet and exercise – especially for people with health problems.
2. Community organisations should hold consultation events about setting up culturally appropriate activity groups.
3. Community organisations should set up English learning sessions for older Chinese people that are relevant to their interests and needs.
4. Chinese and non-Chinese organisations should work together to make it easier for older Chinese people to use non-Chinese services.
5. Health service providers should make sure that work to tackle isolation and loneliness targets and includes Chinese communities.

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

- Even when there are differences between people in a minority community, they may feel they have more in common with each other than with the majority community in some parts of their lives.
- Older people in small minority communities need culturally appropriate activities and services as well as mainstream services being fully accessible.
- English language learning must be available to people of all ages.
- Community-based organisations need sustainable support to provide places where older people in minority communities feel they are accepted and valued.

More information

The full report contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Ethnic Health Forum’s findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the Ageing Equally? shorter project reports and summaries from the Equalities Board website here:

<https://lgbt.foundation/ambition-for-ageing/publications>

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?” You can find out more about the Ageing Equally? research programme here:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>