

Textiles, Place and Generation: From Pakistan to Oldham

Ambition for Ageing “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by Oldham Coliseum

Simpler summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by Oldham Coliseum.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The Equalities Board team 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

Bonding capital = the strength of a community's connection between its members

Bridging capital = the ability of a community or individuals to make connections with others that are different from themselves

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)

Curating = choosing what things to put in an exhibition and describing how they are related to each other

Data = information

Deprived = not having enough money for basic necessities

Facet methodology = a way of doing research that uses a mixture of research methods to explore one central experience or issue - like looking more deeply at a gemstone by shining a light on its different facets

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

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

Taboos = things that are forbidden in a particular culture

Textiles = practical or decorative objects made of cloth and using skills such as sewing

1. Introduction and background

Oldham Coliseum

Oldham Coliseum is a 135-year old theatre in Oldham. It stages original plays and musicals, holds concerts, runs community projects, and hosts family-friendly theatre and activities.

Older Pakistani women in South Glodwick

The women who took part in the research are from the Pakistani community living in Glodwick in South Oldham. Most of the houses in Glodwick were built around the same time as the theatre, for workers in the cotton mills. The area is one of the most deprived areas in England, with high levels of poverty.

Aims of the research

The research aimed to find out more about how textiles are part of understanding what 'home' and 'place' mean for the older women in this community. The project had five questions:

- What helps or stops the women feeling 'at home' in Oldham and how is their age and gender part of this?

- What does 'home' and 'place' mean to these women and how have these meanings changed for them since they came to Oldham?
- What does their understanding of 'home' and 'place' say about the way they are valued in their community?
- How do they use textiles to share what they feel with other people who are younger or not from Pakistan?
- How are textiles and sewing important for these women in creating a sense of 'home' or 'place' in Oldham?

Summary of findings

The research found that, for these women, being Pakistani, older and female determined their experiences of ageing in Oldham. Being in a tight knit community helped them to survive, but it also made them more isolated from the wider community. They found it difficult to access transport. They loved nature and need to connect with it. They need accessible community spaces to maintain their social networks.

2. Method: How Oldham Coliseum did their research

Twenty-two women aged from 55 to 68 took part in the project. All of them speak Urdu as their first language. Most of the women live alone in their own homes; five live in rented social housing. All of the women are first generation migrants who had moved to England from Pakistan in the 1970s when they were young.

The researchers used an approach called 'facet methodology'. This uses a mix of methods that enable researchers and participants to explore different parts of everyday life. The methods can be creative and participatory. The methods in this project included: making story boards of images relating to the women's memories, curating an exhibition and talking to the people who came to it, creative workshops, and making creative work together.



Caption text reads: "I embroidered all the cushions in my home, short poems onto pillows and wall hangings, poems about love and faith."

3. Findings: What Oldham Coliseum found out

a) Identity

The women's histories and experiences as first generation migrants from Pakistan are at the core of their identities. Their experiences of being older Pakistani women have shaped their cultural memories, their hopes and expectations, and their cultural values. Their experiences and expectations are very different from younger Pakistani women, such as their daughters. Traditional activities of sewing and making clothing and decorative materials has always been important to them as part of their identities as wives and

mothers. Meeting and sewing together in the project workshops for the first time in many years helped to strengthen their sense of community.

b) Community and isolation

The women are from a very close community of first generation Pakistani migrants. This closeness helped them over the years to develop a sense of belonging in their new home. The local area has Pakistani shops and other businesses where the women can speak Urdu – many of the women did not need to learn English. In addition, the community has a tradition of families taking care of elders. The downside of this is that people can become very isolated when their children grow up and move away, and they become widowed. Not speaking much English means it is difficult to go outside South Glodwick for arts and other opportunities that are not available nearby.

c) Access to nature and social space

The workshops proved that social space is very important to the women. The theme of nature kept appearing in their embroidery, showing that nature connection is important for their wellbeing. However, because of living in an insular community, and because of old taboos that women should not learn to drive, none of the women had bus passes, and none could drive. They did not like to 'pester' people to give them lifts unless it was to go to the doctor or for an emergency. This means that they miss out on cultural activities outside their immediate area.

Discussion

The project highlighted the positive story of women who migrated from Pakistan to Oldham in the 1970s, through celebrating their textile skills and traditions, and their memories. However, it also showed the need to develop the women's access to cultural and social spaces. The women in this group are at high risk of social isolation and loneliness. They welcomed the opportunity to take part in the project and share their time and creativity with each other and the wider community.

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

- Older women in minority communities carry memories through the skills and traditions of daily life, that are important to the whole community. They need to be able to celebrate their stories, memories, and cultural traditions and skills.
- Tight-knit communities and traditionally close family structures create bonding capital, which helps with the challenges of migrating to a new country. However these structures can be obstacles to communities developing bridging capital and can increase the risk of isolation.
- Older people in marginalised communities need to be supported to access community spaces where they can take part in cultural activities and also socialise.
- It is important for people to be able to go to places where they can connect with nature.
- People within marginalised communities may face additional cultural, language and financial barriers to accessing public transport.

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 Oldham Coliseum’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>

Photos: Courtesy of Oldham Coliseum

