

Recognising risks, choices and resources in loneliness and disconnection as older peoples' roles change over time and in different social settings

Older peoples' roles and relationships with those around them can increasingly be seen to be dynamic and developmental, as older people themselves and those who work and research with them become aware of the potential in and for constructive change. This issue highlights the need to recognise changing roles and resources in ideas and research to support older peoples' wellbeing and agency.

Robertson's policy commentary reviews the psychological literature to argue for the development of psycho-social interventions to more successfully engage with the experiences and motivations of isolated people who cannot be assumed to be always lonely, vulnerable or lacking in choices. Taking a too-simple view of the absence of social connections is likely to ignore the psychological drivers which may contribute.

Complexity in the nature and structure of social connections and disconnections over time is seen in the research review by Fish about the relational nature and circumstances of loneliness for older LGBT people. She discusses factors which may affect their ability to build relationships of trust and openness which, as identity-related networks may shrink in later life, may put single-household members of this group at greater risk of loneliness.

The usefulness for family members of shifting intergenerational roles for older people to build novel connective activities and narratives is highlighted by the research of MacFarlane *et al.* Rather than endorsing an imaginary of inevitable "distance" between older or much older family members and the very young, this study of the experiences and effects of an intergenerational programme sees older people seeing themselves as "plugging gaps" in teaching and care created by other social and demographic changes and creating opportunities to revisit their own experiences of being very young themselves.

Ensuring research can be inclusive of the experience of older people and those involved with them in as wide a range of settings as possible means building relationships with gatekeepers of those settings. This is certainly the case for care homes which are subject to a range of pressures and risks for those providing them and which may constrain their readiness to enable research. Smith *et al.* have drawn on their experience of building two research studies where they were able to evaluate the usefulness of three different strategies to encourage managers of care homes to take part in research. As well as advantages, each strategy brought challenges to be overcome and the authors consider ways of mitigating these as well as highlighting the importance of wider organisations and initiatives such as ENRICH to provide more encouragement and useful resources for researchers to successfully engage with the working realities of managerial roles and care homes settings.

The enterprising relational actions of older people themselves is helping to shift ideas of what is possible for them to achieve in terms of sustaining their resources, social support, their health and therefore their relationships with health providers. The ethnographic study reported by Ohashi *et al.* of northeast Japanese recognises small shopkeepers' own strategies to address these issues by deploying responsibilities flexibly, and using personal capital to cooperate constructively, while also compensating through families, for the pressures being placed on their health. This suggests a need for modern health providers such as nursing staff to be prepared to recognise older people in these circumstances as having very different expectations and resources if their health and wellbeing is to be well-supported in the wider health and social context.