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5 IMISCOE network, Standing Committee 'Ageing Migrants'

Location

University of Geneva

Concept

To contribute to vulnerability research, the aim of the workshop 'Loneliness in ageing and migrant populations: a comparative perspective' is to bring together an interdisciplinary group of researchers working on loneliness among elderly populations, including migrants. In this way we will compare older natives and older migrants, explore if older migrants are lonelier than older adults in general or on the contrary there are factors protecting them from loneliness. Furthermore, the aim is to talk across disciplines while keeping constant the core theme of the discussion 'loneliness in ageing populations'; loneliness being a key facet of vulnerability. The disciplines we will bring to the discussion are sociology, migration studies, gerontology, psychology, demography, socio-economics and public health. Moreover, we are interested in the methodological developments to study vulnerability, among which loneliness.

To better plan this day, please register by sending an e-mail to oana.ciobanu@unige.ch. There is no fee to attend the workshop, but registration is required.

Invited speakers

Prof. Christina Victor, Brunel University, United Kingdom

A public health perspective on loneliness

The established representation of loneliness in the UK was as a social problem of old age: a characterisation that can be traced back to the surveys of older people conducted in the immediate post war period by Sheldon and developed by Townsend and Tunstall. This paper will explore how and why loneliness has been transformed from a social problem of old age to a public health problem with health consequences worse than smoking to a moral panic whereby loneliness among older people generates 'excess' service use that threatens the very future of the NHS and is a problem within contemporary society that has resulted in the creation of a Minister for Loneliness. Using a range of different data sources including from the BBC Loneliness experiment which had 55,000 responses of whom approximately 13,000 were aged 60+, this paper has the ambition to challenge this now established corpus of received wisdom and cast a more creative and critical gaze on the topic of loneliness in later life with the aim of generating fresh thinking. We use the data from the BBC survey which provides insights and reflection from older adults as to which period of their lifecourse has been the loneliest. This enables us to put loneliness in later life into a broader lifecourse perspective rather than seeing it in isolation from the rest of the lives of individuals.

Prof. Tineke Fokkema, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, University of Groningen, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Loneliness among older migrants

Loneliness is a universal phenomenon, in the sense of applying to every person in every society. The most common definition of loneliness is the unpleasant emotional experience resulting from a perceived discrepancy between one's actual and desired relationships. Individuals are not at the same level of risk for loneliness, however. Apart from the well-known and repeatedly observed association between loneliness and certain socio-demographic characteristics (being older, living alone, poor health, low socioeconomic status), the ethno-cultural background of individuals seems also to play an important role in the experience of loneliness: several

European studies have shown that older migrants are at increased risk of loneliness compared to their native peers, all the more so if they are from collectivistic societies.

The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of current knowledge about the reasons for the high prevalence of loneliness among older migrants, as well as the ways they might prevent or alleviate feelings of loneliness. The empirical evidence will be largely based on data collected on older Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese living in the Netherlands. The presentation will start by examining the extent to which older migrants' higher level of loneliness is attributable to their poorer health and precarious financial position. Next, to avoid the potential pitfall of problematizing and stigmatizing the older migrant population, attention will be paid to differences in loneliness between and within older migrant groups. Special focus will be on migrant-specific factors that may or may not have a protective effect against loneliness, e.g. having a (supportive) social network, language proficiency, religiosity, and attachment to the larger society, their own ethnic group and/or their country of origin. The presentation will end by addressing next steps for further research and promising loneliness interventions for older migrants.

Prof. Theo van Tilburg, Department of Sociology, Free University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Equivalence in the cross-cultural assessment of loneliness

Usually it is assumed that scores obtained with standardized survey instruments reflect differences in the underlying concept. However, this assumption is challenged when comparing people from different cross-cultural backgrounds. Construct equivalence can be assessed by delving into the theoretical construct: its meaning, associated behaviors and the nomological network. Measurement equivalence can be assessed by studying the psychometric properties. The presentation discusses both forms of equivalence in the study of loneliness differences. Data are from the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam with 176 people born in Morocco and 235 people born in Turkey, aged 55-66 years, and living in urban areas. They migrated on average 35 years ago to the Netherlands. They are compared with a matched sample of 292 older people of Dutch origin. Because bonding is seen as a basic social need, loneliness is prevalent in different

cultures. Associations with social behaviors (characteristics of the social network), social position and health are sufficient similar among migrants and older people of Dutch origin. The psychometric properties of the loneliness scale are satisfying, although there is some differential item functioning. The meaning of some loneliness items is discussed. It is concluded that there is equivalence in the assessment of loneliness in the three samples.

Language of the event

Presentations and the discussion will be in English. We are not able to provide a translation into French.

Poster session

We plan to organise a poster session on issues around social vulnerability for example loneliness, social networks, social capital, discrimination, participation in organisations or other related topics. If you would like to present your current work, please send us a working title for your poster.