University Students Addressing Ageing Problems: A Case Study of "Being a Happy Person"

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Introduction

- **Lingnan University**
  - "Education for Service"; service-learning as a teaching model
  - Establishment of the 1st stand-alone Service-Learning office among the universities in HK
  - Provision of chance for students to engage with the community and apply their academic knowledge
Lingnan Model of Service-Learning

- **Combination of "Formal Academic Studies", "Reflection" and "Meaningful Service"**

- **The purpose of service**
  - Reinforce students’ knowledge learned in classroom
  - Use critical thinking skills and self-reflection
  - Establish interaction among multiple stakeholders in SL projects
Ageing Problem in Hong Kong

- **Definition of Older Persons (OP)**
  - Diverse
  - Persons aged 65 and over are widely regarded as older persons in HK

- **Statistical facts about HK ageing**
  - Proportion of OPs in the total population (TP)
    - From 2.8% in 1961 to 13.3% in 2011
  - Rapid population growth of ageing
    - (TP) grew by 39% between 1981 and 2013 Versus there is an 197% in population aged 65 and over
  - Forecast in distribution of population
    - Continuation in population growth in the next 20-30 years
    - Slight growth in population
    - From 7.2 million today to 8.5 million in 2041

Factors to Ageing Population

1. **Major force: longer life expectancy**
   - Advancement of technology as a driving force
   - Estimate of men and women to live longer
     - In 2012, at least 80 years
     - the longest life expectancy in the world

2. **Major force: deduction in fertility rate**
   - HK families are having fewer children
   - no. and proportion of persons aged under 15
   - Lowest fertility rate among the world
     - Total fertility rate in 2012: 1.3; far lower than the ideal level of 2
   - Evidence: shrinking base of the pyramids

Factors to Ageing Population

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Problems faced by the Older Persons (OPs)

1. Elderly Poverty
   - Low (No) income, and thus low (No) savings
   - Unprotected under Mandatory Provident Fund
     - **Aim:** to provide secured retirement benefits for the workforce of HK
   - Dependent upon the government’s welfares and benefit
     - Subsidized public housing
     - Monetary Assistance
Problems faced by the Older Persons (OPs)

2 Decline in family and community support

- **Value of filial piety**
  - OPs rely upon their grown-up children for care and support

- **Co-residence of OPs and their adult children**
  - From 60.3% in 1996 to 56.8% in 2001 and to 53.5% in 2006

- **Spirit of mutual help among people**
  - the availability of community support and care

- **Pursuit of individualism**
  - Cultivation of being apathetic to public affairs, ageing issues etc.

Research questions

1. What are the possible images of the older persons in the eye of university students? And why.

2. In what ways can the Service-Learning project help university students construct a new idea towards older persons?

3. What is the prominent learning of students through the Service-Learning project?

4. How did the project enhance the Older Persons’ quality of lives?
Case study
“Being a Happy Person”

- **Direct Service-Learning**
  - SOC 3203 Social Gerontology

- **Corporation of Lingnan University and The Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council (NAAC) Fu Tai Neighbourhood Elderly Centre**

- **NAAC Fu Tai Neighbourhood Elderly Centre**
  - Non profit-making organization, founded in 1968
  - Emphasis on self-help, integration and mutual support
  - Provision of community development and welfare services for the neighbourhood
    - OPs visit the NAAC elderly centres nearby and join various activities to broaden social networks

- **Project Details:**
  - Some older participants were limited in physical movements
    - E.g. Dementia or wheelchair-bound
  - To construct six-time activities to the OPs in the NAAC Fu Tai Neighbourhood Elderly Centre

The relationship between the Service-Learning Project and Ageing

1. In the level of student participants
   - Self-reflection and self-evaluation
   - Students’ feedback to the project

2. In the level of older participants
   - Social Involvement
   - Active ageing
   - Healthy life
Methodology

- **Quantitative method**
  - Pre and Post Test

- **Qualitative method**
  - Focus group
  - Secondary Sources
### Result of Pre Test & Post Test

**Department of Sociology and Social Policy**  
**2014-2015 Semester 1 SOC203/3203 Social Gerontology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome Indicator</th>
<th>Score Pre-test</th>
<th>Std. Dev. Pre-test</th>
<th>Score Post-test</th>
<th>Std. Dev. Post-test</th>
<th>Difference (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject-related Knowledge</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>8.43</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td><strong>21.90%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td><strong>-0.84%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization skills</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td><strong>2.59%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Competence</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td><strong>2.56%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Skills</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td><strong>5.70%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Skills</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td><strong>13.11%</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic Orientation</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>9.84%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to frequent information collection
Focus Group of student participants

- **Two students participants as interviewees**
  - Bridget and Sharon (Students from Faculty of Social Sciences)
  - Conducted during early-May

- **Three dimensions**
  - Students’ views towards the OPs before the Service-Learning project, and
  - After the project
  - Individuals’ learning upon the project
Students’ views towards the OPs before the Service-Learning project

1. OPs as disabled with ages, physically dysfunction
   - “I used to link the elderly with disability”, “…getting old, their bodies cannot function well.”, “they may suffer...chronics diseases”, “…lead to physical disability.” ~ S

2. OPs are emotionally and mentally vulnerable
   - “some social workers...told us some tips about serving the elderly.”, “…we should not ask about their family...”, “… we should be only allowed to say ‘see you next time’ when ... sure to see them soon, or they ... feel sad...”. ~ B
Students’ views towards the OPs after the Service-Learning project

1. Deduction in ageing stereotyping
   - “change my way ...understand the older persons.”,”...what I know was from media,...lead to biases.”,”...should not draw conclusion before...understand...”,”I realize...though they indeed have physical disabilities,...they are not limited...”

   ~ S

2. Successful Ageing is good for the Older Persons
   - “I inspired...what I can do for my grandparents.”, “...helped them to achieve Successful Ageing,...a better way ... extending health life expectancy and enhancing quality of life.” ~ B
Individuals’ learning upon the project

1. Knowledge enhancement, academically and technically
   - “…I learnt …terms related to the elderly,…oral history and dimentia…” ~ B

2. Grasping is through interaction, but not judgment
   - “…should not hold stereotypes before … interact…”, “…trapped in our own subjective explanations,… cannot learn and understand the truth.” ~ S
Enhancement of the Older Persons’ quality of lives

- **Self-concept: important to the transition of old ages**
  - Self-concept is individual’s belief about self *(Baumeister, 1999)*
    - Person’s attributes and who and what the self is
  - Physical disabilities can make OPs frustrated and result in low self-esteem
  - Worsen by being afraid of facing the reality and insufficient support
    - Less social contacts with others

- **Being active impacts positively upon OPs’ health**
  - Activity Theory of ageing *(Havighurst, 1961)*
  - Physical disability cannot limit the social involvement in community
  - Recreational activities is essential to maintain joys in later life
    - Mass games or cooking helps delight them by preserving, even boosting dignity and self-esteem
    - Establishment of a new set of roles, interests and interpersonal relationship
Enhancement of the Older Persons’ quality of lives

- **Formation of a new relationship**
  - **Role theory:** OPs experience loss of employment role, but new roles can take their places (Cottrell, 1942)
  - **Older volunteers play assisting roles in activity**
    - Assistance to older participants in activities, interaction with them as peers
  - **Maintenance of a continuous social relationship**
    - Positive effects on physical, mental health and also mortality (Mendes de Leon et al., 1999)
  - **New social circles Versus the ones they had lost in workplace**
    - Personal development, positive interpersonal relationships and life-long learning

Training in handling the wheelchairs

Group Photo in the last activity
Older volunteers also happily get involved in the project.

An older person actively participates in the activity.
Conclusion

- Evolution in positive perception and attitudes by students, towards older people, both with disabilities and with healthy status
  - From ignorance to thorough understanding of older persons
- Provision of playfulness and encouragement in independence, social inclusion, communication
- Solid contribution to the increase in quality of life of Older Persons
- Improvement in positive image of old age
  - Life can be meaningful with advancing age
Reference