

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

② Deduction in fertility rate

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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

② Qualitative method

- Focus group
- Secondary Sources

Result of Pre Test & Post Test

Increase in academic knowledge

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

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

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 dementia...” ~ 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

Cottrell, L. S. (1942). The adjustment of the individual to his age and sex roles. *American Sociological Review*, 7, 617-620.

Mendes de Leon et al. (1999). Population based study of social and productive activities as predictors of survival among elderly Americans. *British Medical Journal*, 319(21), 478-483.



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

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