

WELLBEING IN OLD AGE

Improving wellbeing is increasingly recognised as an important objective for public policy. Over the last three years researchers from the University of Brighton and Age UK Brighton & Hove have been working with older people to explore what wellbeing means to them, and how it is generated. Marian Barnes, professor of social policy, and research fellow Dr Lizzie Ward, both from the School of Applied Social Science carried out the work in partnership with Dr Beatrice Gahagan, senior manager at Age UK and a team of older peer researchers from the Age UK volunteer base.

Thirty older people aged between 67 and 97 took part in interviews designed to enable older people to talk in their own terms about what wellbeing means to them, and how this is produced. The interviews explored common themes such as money; where people lived; their health and relationships with others. A further 59 people took part in focus groups and staff and volunteers working for Age UK Brighton & Hove were interviewed to explore their views on what wellbeing means to older people. The interviews and focus groups were carried out by the older peer researchers.

The research found that, while many older people were enjoying their lives, some said they found it hard to sustain a sense of wellbeing, either because of the loss of friends and family, health issues or loss of identity and structure that they enjoyed when working. Some found it hard to adjust to personal changes and to changes in the world around them.

Professor Barnes said: “Our research demonstrated not only the challenges that older people face to sustain their wellbeing, and the hard emotional and organisational labour that goes in to this, but also the resources that they draw on to ‘be well’ in old age and the different adaptations people face at different stages which may span a period of 30 years or more.”

The research also highlights the importance of different types of relationships to older people’s wellbeing. The quality of relationships not only with family and friends, and with health and social care providers, but encounters with GP receptionists, people at the bus stop or at checkout counters in shops, can make a difference to how people feel about themselves, because they indicate how others feel about them. For those who are either/both giving and receiving care because of illness, disability or mental health difficulties, the quality of caring relationships is especially significant.



Practical things make a difference and the research confirms other work that suggests wellbeing is not straightforwardly associated with having lots of money. But feeling secure in having enough, and being able to deal with unexpected expenses is important. And those who are financially comfortable do have more choices when it comes to deciding things like where to move to if looking after a big house becomes too difficult, or getting about is problematic because of restricted mobility.

(Adapted from www.brighton.ac.uk)

FILL IN THE TABLE

ACTIVITIES



- Fill in the chart with information from the text.

THE BRIGHTON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH	
①	Researchers
②	Institution conducting the research
③	How many people were interviewed
④	Age of the interviewed
⑤	How many people were involved in focus groups
⑥	Who carried out interviews and focus groups
⑦	Findings

WRITING

- Sum up the results of this research in a short paragraph.

SPEAKING

- Moving from the results of this research, what measures can be promoted to improve seniors' everyday life? Discuss with the rest of the class.