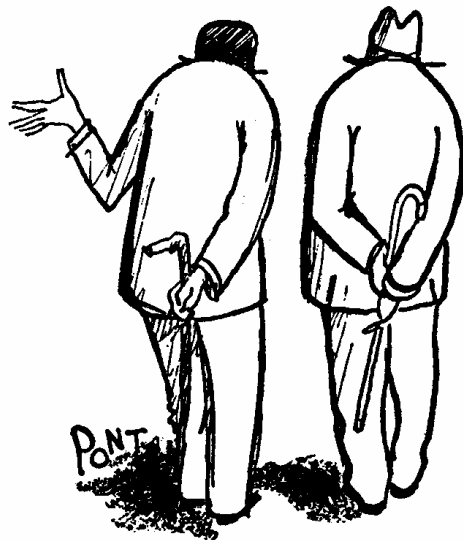


An Evaluation of the role and Purpose of Research undertaken with Older People.



“The fact is, my dear fellow—and you may as well admit it—we’re not so young as we were forty years ago.”

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Participative or patronising? An evaluation of the role and purpose of research undertaken with older people.

23 September 2006

Abstract

Arising out of our collaboration and involvement in the Forward/Equal project based at the University of Birmingham (see Adamaschew, Ogilvie and Maltby, 2005), a small scale investigation was conducted, supported by the Averil Osborn Fund, into how other research organisations select, use and involve older people in carrying out research, how effectively older people carry out this work and whether there are any particular advantages or disadvantages in using this resource compared with younger

people. Both academic and non academic researchers had been interviewed from a diverse range of projects and locations throughout the UK since January 2006. A preliminary paper was presented at the 2006 B S G conference as partial completion of the Averil Osborn Award which is supported by the B S G. This paper gives details of our work, how we planned the research, the implementation phase and our conclusions.

Executive Summary

One of the plans behind this research project was to carry out the work without any pre-conceptions of previous research relating to working with older people in research. However, we have consulted the literature when compiling this summary and our analysis of the findings is informed by that literature. We feel that the literature review helps to place our research into context and confirms our own research endeavours.

We make the point that the limited extent of this study means that we can only claim that our results give indicative conclusions. The object of our Research Project was: 'To examine The Role and Purpose of Research carried out by Older People'. In most cases the objective of the research, for those projects we reviewed, was to glean information from groups of older people using semi-structured interviewing techniques or "guided conversations"; to this end the research organisers organised training courses. The outcomes were successful using older people thus demonstrating the suitability of this age group. The fact that all the university teams would tap this resource again demonstrates their confidence and

there was an equally positive response from the older participants.

The outcomes of the research have led to an increase in knowledge about the needs of older people which has been disseminated to local and national government bodies. One research group felt that there was not enough feedback of results either during or after the project. We have found our project very interesting and hope that some of our findings will be of value even though this is a very small project with insignificant sampling of the overall picture. The literature review attempts to confirm if any of our conclusions are mirrored in other research, this may validate our work or perhaps open up an idea for further investigation. Matching training to the project was identified as an important requirement by the research leaders. We have, perhaps identified an additional issue to take into account and that is the educational experience of the older researchers particularly in respect of teaching methods. Our research into the current literature revealed the importance of training as revealed in work carried out by the research team led by Roger Clough:

"We wanted to work with older people in a different way, as research colleagues rather than advisers or research subjects"In addition we hoped that this would lead to their research contributions being evaluated positively and taken seriously by policy makers." – (*How older people become researchers – Intro. para. 1 p1*)

The main differences between older and younger people from a research point of view are the "useful" differences in experience. The older people have a lifetime of experience this

means they are used to interacting with both older and younger people. The Roger Clough research team made the following comment in relation to the suitability of older people in research:

As we hoped and anticipated, there is absolutely no doubt that the relationship, between trainee older researchers and interviewees, was different from that which would have been achieved by younger researchers. As peers, they came from a

similar generation and had similar life experiences and outlook on life, as well as having a common interest in the research topic itself. (*Teaching older people to be researchers p25 para 3*)

Young people are likely to be more mobile, perhaps more experienced with modern equipment and have a different perspective on many things. The synergy of these differences could be useful in a research context.

The literature review confirmed our contention that older people do have intellectual powers that can be harnessed almost regardless of formal academic qualifications. Life experiences put

older people in a special place partly because of communication skills gained by interacting with people of all ages. Specialist skills can be gained by training courses designed for specific projects. The validity of research projects can be supervised by 'research professionals'. We believe that the older people can provide a valid resource that should be retained in order to build up experience and not waste the research potential.

Background

The effect of general economic changes in the world, the decline of primary industries and the introduction of the new technologies in industries in Britain have contributed to the dramatic changes in employment patterns. The processes associated with globalisation has made it easier to relocate various types of business to developing countries like India or even to larger plants in European countries where labour costs are lower. There is greater employment mobility within the new European work force especially the new EU countries. Whilst unemployment has

remained relatively low there has been a devastating effect on the employment situation for older people in this country especially hard for some of the minority ethnic groups

These older people have been out of education for long time and have skills that do not match current labour market requirements and some do not possess any formal education. So becoming unemployed at such late age seems like uphill struggle for them.

(Statistics from various sources that help to put some of the following comments into perspective:

- **750,000 people over 50 would like to be working, if they thought that there was a relevant opportunity to do so. [Sheffield – Hallam University – The detached male workforce 1999] It is relevant today because this is a growing demographic fact.**
- **Only 1 in 10 of those made redundant over age 45 ever return to a job. This compares with 60% of under 45s, who find a new job within 3 months. [Office of national statistics – Social Focus on older people 1999] On the other hand: 45% of over 45s in early retirement said they would like to work again if there were opportunities. [Research for DfEE 2000])**

The unemployment problem for 50+ is growing, partly due to the demographic shift. Personal experience shows that, even when there is help available; the

dedicated job research support has been of poor quality. When older people see that no significant efforts are being made to find them employment than the feeling of being

unwanted quickly sets in and this result in loss of confidence. They feel too old, too excluded, to make any positive contribution to society and country. Therefore they are very reluctant to attend educational institutions again to equip themselves with new skills which may help them to gain new employment. Whilst it is true that a proportion of over fifties are claiming incapacity benefit rather than job seekers allowance there are approaching one million that would like to work. This huge potential will need to be mobilised to ensure the economic prosperity of the Country as the twin effects of demographic changes come into effect. The UK has a

large number of people heading for retirement and longer old age and a smaller number of younger people, staying in education longer, coming into the workplace. On the other hand we have healthier older people, capable of working longer. We have a situation where people work from 20 – 50 (when they are too old!) 30 years, on the other hand there are people who want to work 50 – 80 (experienced but perhaps needing education) another 30 years of economic potential wasted. This is the reason why we are interested in the capabilities of older people. Life is full of labels, we would suggest: -

Childhood	- Education	Age	- Early Middle Age	- Late Middle Age	- Maturity
0 – 10	11 -20		21 – 50	51 – 80	80 +
Growing	Learning		Gaining Experience	Using Experience	Using our
			Working Years		Benefits

The Community Research Team

Background

A number of young and older people have been involved in Equal Forward from the beginning to end. Some of these older workers took special interest in innovative research on the older worker which was being lead by Tony Maltby from the Institute of Applied Social Studies at the University of Birmingham. As a result of being involved in this research these people ended up having better understanding of the barriers to employment which are being faced by the older workers. Some of these participants were given opportunities to visit other European countries such as Finland and Germany as an integral part of the research. From these visits the participants unanimously agree on one issue that the high rate of unemployment in 50+ is not

restricted to this country but is prevalent throughout Europe too.

The participants, who went to visit Finland, said that Finland too has high rate of unemployment in all sectors of society especially those who are in the older workers age range. Although some support is being provided for these older workers in up-grading their skills and support is provided in job research they are still finding employment for their client very difficult.

They said the visit was interesting and it gave them an opportunity to see employment issues which are being faced by the local communities of that country. Our host showed us the work which is

being carried to develop their 'Virtual Rehabilitator'. This software was being developed for the disabled people who have the skills which can be sold for money. The disabled people using this computer software are able to become self employed and are able to remove themselves from dependency on state benefits. It appears that his software can also be used by the skilled older people to become self employed and removed themselves from the unemployed register.

They also had an opportunity to visit a rehabilitation centre where support is given to people who are unable to work because of industrial injuries. Those who attended were being given training in other skills so to prepare them for the world of work again. These training courses were being presented in a very well equipped training centre. The centre was also providing support for recuperation for highly stressed professionals such as teachers.

The visit to Germany turned out to even more interesting for everybody but especially for one participant who ever since he was young has adored Germany and wanted to visit it. Therefore as soon as he had completed his 'O' levels he started learning German and to find more about the country by reading the Germany classic writers such as Herman Hess and Kafka. But after failing at university he gets married and his life priority dramatically changed so he was not able to fulfil his dream of visiting Germany.

Therefore imagine his delighted when 33 years after completing his 'O' level and though his involvement in the Equal Forward DP he was selected not once but twice to visit Germany. However Germany he had visited was nothing like Germany he used to imagine when he was young. The country had high rate of employment in all sector of the communities and areas of Germany were quite poor.

In England there are large numbers of people who have come from many countries to live here but majority of these people are from India/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh. Germany has significant numbers of minority ethnic people of Turkish descent. This visit has given the participants a great opportunity to see the kind of support is that is being given to these people. Although it was apparent from the visit these people were receiving good support, on further investigation it was revealed that these projects, in which the people were working were unlikely to last beyond the end of the grant period.

Birmingham University was funded by the Equal Forward partnership to carry out research on older workers. We are three individuals over the age of 50 who lived in three different areas of Birmingham and independently joined Equal Forward partnership as volunteer researchers. We all have the diverse backgrounds:

One of us has qualifications in business management and worked with Coral the leading UK bookmaker. He travelled extensively and has worked in Japan and New Zealand and speaks German but has faced long periods of unemployment. The second of us was a Student Apprentice and trained in Automobile Engineering at Humber Ltd, he is a qualified mechanical engineer. He remained the automotive industry throughout his life. He has held various positions in this industry in this country and abroad. The third too has faced a long period of the unemployment in his past life even though he holds qualifications in Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering. He worked as an advice and guidance worker, software engineer and Electronics/ repaired/ assembly technician. None of us before has ever been involved in applied social research. Therefore when we were offered an opportunity to join the Equal Forward partnership we were delighted to accept it.

Just like our backgrounds, our involvement in Equal Forward Partnership was equally diverse; two of us helped in setting up discussion group and carried out interviewing. While the third member of the group helped in setting up a discussion group and acted as observer/ interpreter during the interviewing sessions. But he was also member of the steering committee which oversaw the research activities that were being carried out by Birmingham University. Being on Equal Forward steering committee gave this member of the group, the opportunity to visit Germany and Finland to compare and contrast employment issues being faced by the older people in those European countries.

As an integral part of our involvement we all completed a ten day training course which was carried out over a 2 week period. The course covered and introduction to Social Research including the ethics of research, data types and

methods of collection and interviewing skills. Some time was spent on examining the project we would be involved in with discussions on the questions that would be used to settle our interviewees and stimulate the conversation. We all enjoyed the experience and the involvement with the University.

In 2004 following completion of the Forward/Equal Project three of us got together and decided that we found social research stimulating and we decided to plan a project of our own. We discovered through conversations with Martin Ogilvie, one of the paid researchers, that the Averil Osborn Fund was prepared to sponsor small scale projects and we put forward a proposal for consideration. We were delighted to hear that at project was under consideration and after taking advice from the evaluation committee a proposal was accepted at the end of 2005.

Literature Review:

How older people became researchers – Mary Leamy and Roger Clough. Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The project describes the involvement of older people in research, developing from a three-year research study called 'Housing Decisions in Old Age', funded by the Community Fund. The story is about a group of older people who had been involved in research becoming researchers in their own right and how they were helped to get there.

This is a really interesting reflection on involving older people in research but it also highlights how important it is to know your students in order to ensure they achieve their potential.

The following quotations are taken from the first section of the report - Teaching Perspectives: –

“We wanted to work with older people in a different way, as research colleagues rather than advisers or research subjects” “In addition we hoped that this would lead to their research contributions being evaluated positively and taken seriously by policy makers.” In our report we highlighted that the projects that we researched had identified the need for training should be appropriate for the project outcome. One of the course aims specified in this report is “select appropriate methodologies for different research questions.” The students were

selected in line with the open access policy of Lancaster University's Department of Continuing Education who were involved in the development of the 'Certificate in Research Methods', all older people over 60 were invited to apply. The issue of the vulnerability of older people who might be interviewed was raised so two further checks were involved. Applicants completed an application form stating their reason for being interested in the course; in addition they supplied two character references. This issue was raised by some of the projects we researched one organisation arranged police checks for the people conducting research and another provided identification badges from the research organisation.

The varying experience brought to the research team is exemplified by this quote from the report:

'One student, for example, was completing an MA degree, whilst another student had left school at fifteen years old. Both brought extremely valuable experience and knowledge to the course and their educational levels did not necessarily have a marked effect on their actual interviewing ability.'

The person carrying out the course presentation was new to teaching and it was very interesting to read how she was guided by several teaching theories but adapted the thinking to recognise the perceived difficulties of a younger person teaching older people with a wide range of experience and formal educational background. The success of the course is perhaps reflected in this quotation from one of the students: (*Teaching older people to be researchers – p17 para 1*)

It was interesting and enlightening to be introduced to methods of interviewing for social research. Having done a great deal of interviewing in my working life (*previously a journalist*) I thought there was little for me to learn. But I was mistaken. I found (*the interviewing skills*) had applications

for many everyday social and other activities such as listening more carefully to get the most out of a conversation, and dealing with verbal enquiries or requests for help. Putting newly learned interviewing skills into practice has been both pleasing and satisfying.

One of the aspects which the researchers were looking for when using older researchers was quality of data this quotation reflects some of the comments that came from our research: 'As we hoped and anticipated, there is absolutely no doubt that the relationship between trainee older researchers and interviewees was different from that which would have been achieved by younger researchers. As peers, they came from a similar generation and had similar life experiences and outlook on life, as well as having a common interest in the research topic itself' The research team also made the following comment on: 'The qualitative interviewing method is designed to allow and encourage interviewees to tell their stories and give them greater control over the interview. The interviewer's role is to gently guide the discussion so the interviewee keeps focused upon the research topic. This is a very skilful, complex task and many older interviewers reported difficulties in keeping the interview focused. This type of comment was common: In the 'home' situation where they were relaxed and voluble the division between relevant and non-relevant became blurred. Sometimes I found it difficult to keep it all to the point and quick decisions had to be made about whether or not to continue to pursue a newly introduced topic or return to the essential thread with a verbal link.' The report describes the structure of the courses developed after discussions with the group of older students. There is a section devoted to developing research proposals and the things that need to be taken into account when carrying out a research project on your own.

Involving Older People in planning and evaluating Community Care – Patricia Thornton & Rosemary Tozer, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The review of this project was carried out by studying the summary produced by John Haxby of the first part of a two part study, entitled 'User involvement in community care: the Contribution of Older People.

The specific aims of the study are:

- to review present initiatives seeking to involve older people, so that current practice can be appraised

- to understand what contribution older people can make to the planning and evaluation of community care, how they can be involved and the outcomes for participants.

- to assess the outcomes of selected user-involvement initiatives for community care provision.

Older frail and disabled people are the largest group of community care users but we know little about how older people, mainly women and often isolated, are enabled to play a part in planning or evaluating what is provided.

National Organisations have aimed to influence attitudes through publications and development programmes but only a few, notably the four Age Concern national organisations have focused on involving older users by producing a guide for their members to clarify their role as a voice for older people.

The report identifies the fact that locally it is increasingly recognised the potential for older peoples involvement but in practical terms it is very small. Locally there are problems around representing older users in a non 'tokenistic' way. Voluntary organisations have traditionally represented the interests of users but there is no clear distinction between groups for and groups of older users. "In some areas

it seems that voluntary organisations speaking for older users must compete with users themselves at the joint planning table."

The Foundation for Involvement depends on an awareness of services – "In order for older people to see themselves as 'service users', they must first know that the kinds of support appropriate to their needs exists. Then they need to know how to negotiate access to these services."

There are a number of initiatives identified in the report showing how information services are brought to the attention of older users either through local press or even home visits. Many older people rely on the professionals. Older people may not be aware of their rights to support and are reticent to express their views. If older people had experience of giving their views on a range of topics they might develop the confidence to be critical of services provided or at least seek assistance.

'One action group run by older people held a day on information and health promotion for older including information stalls and health workshops, with a tea dance and lunch. Over 200 people attended and around 60 people said they were interested in joining the organisation.'

'Numerous respondents pointed out that older people are in the majority among volunteers organisations. Individual volunteers provide visiting, relief care, meals, and social and educational services for community care users. Increasingly, organisations of older people are taking on service provision.'

Summary: 'Initiatives illustrate how older people can be encouraged to achieve self-development, both individually and together. Appropriate support is important

through provision of information or the development of confidence and specific skills if older people are to contribute to community care in effective ways.'

There are a number of ways that older people can get involved they are identified in the review under four heading: Open opportunities typically conferences and public meetings organised for older people by planning authorities, non-statutory bodies and organisations of older people.

Joining – membership organisations by older people that try to influence provision which affects quality of life in the community.

Closed involvement: where individual older people have been targeted or a predetermined number of participants have been recruited.

Home ground opportunities: often called 'outreach' participants are approached in the home or in service or social settings rather than in a specially created structure for contact.

This review occurred in 1993 so there may have been developments since this time however many of the conclusions still ring true. There needs to be awareness of services and of the right to a voice however few initiatives appear to be challenging the parameters set by the community care planning system. Methods appear to have been adopted without exploring what older people like or dislike. There may be more sensitivity to older people's requirements where older people themselves have been involved in the planning of events.

Growing Older, quality of life in old age – Joanne Cook, Tony Maltby & Lorna Warren.

A section of this report concentrates on 'A participatory approach to older women's quality of life' this is the topic of our literature review. This research project was one that we selected a subject for our research and the main direction is clearly described in this way: 'The methodology we adopted and developed throughout the lifetime of the project should inform the current 'modernising government' agenda and its encouragement of participative democratic involvement and the empowerment of citizens; even though this later concept remains contested and often abused (Starkey, 2003).

Objectives of the research

The central aim of the Older Women's Lives and Voices project was to 'demystify the lives of older women as a basis for change'. The central tenet can be expanded into four key objectives:

- 1) To contribute to knowledge about older women's lives, especially their everyday understanding of quality of life.

- 2) To generate new knowledge about ways in which older women across different racial and ethnic communities promote their quality of life, particularly in relation to service use.
- 3) To inform policymakers and service providers about the experience of older women in using public services, defined as being relevant to quality of life and about older women's perceptions of their ability to 'have a say' about the services which impact on their lives.
- 4) To contribute to the development of ethically appropriate participatory or social action research methods in the study of policy and older women's lives.

Overarching these objectives, the primary focus of the research was to raise awareness of issues affecting the quality of life of older women across a range of

different ethnic groups and their ability to have a say in services available to them.' This study was only concerned with the people of Sheffield and the services provided for them. The important point of focus for the study was to concentrate on the experiences of older people themselves rather than the interests and concern of the service provider. In this way there is a better chance of finding out how older people might play an important part in policy making processes. As stated by the research team 'Quality of life' is a contested concept and this research sought, through a qualitative and participative methodology to ground it in an understanding of the lived experience of older women's lives from a range of ethnically diverse groups. Hence the use of the twofold delineation of quality of life as 'what factors are good and what makes life difficult'.

Following an initial pilot study there were 11 discussion groups with older women that met three times. The participants were encouraged to talk about the broad topics of 'growing older', 'using services' and 'having a say'. The groups were given free rein to discuss the topics to their own interpretation of the subject. From these groups ten volunteers were recruited and trained to interview individual members of the groups about their life and experiences. Working alongside the researchers volunteers selected topics for and carried out these life story interviews.

The interviews were taped and analysed using computer software to identify key themes and sub themes.

In addition there were discussions held with a wide cross section of agencies and service providers to assess their views on the issue of participation in policy making processes.

The Key Findings were that abstract concepts like the 'quality of life' and 'the desire to have a say' varied according to the group and needed to be referenced to the issues each group raised. Some were used to expressing their views and were active in lobbying service providers whilst others had no experience in consultation. With regard, however, to 'having a say' it was clear, contrary to the myths of passive older women, that all of the women worked with were keen to demonstrate their capacity to define their own needs and were determined to get their views heard. They concluded that given the right support and opportunity, 'older women are more than capable of defining and expressing their needs' This is illustrated by a quote from a member who lived in a residential home 'I am sure they thought I wish that old lady would go and lie down somewhere and shut up. I can't keep my mouth shut I have to say what I think; if they don't like it well I can't help it.' It is clear that there are many challenging issues with dealing with issues involving older people this is particularly so when dealing with first generation ethnic groups where language is the first barrier compounded by trauma issues for people who have escaped from a war zone and cultural issues involving a multitude of Faiths. There is undoubtedly a huge challenge in education and resources to meet an ever growing issue of an ageing population.

Our comment is that the human resource may be available within the younger element of this ageing group it may need some training and financial help to mobilise a group that have demonstrated their ability to empathise and work with older people.

The role of older people in Social Research – Sheila Peace

Why involve older people in research? Is the opening sentence in this piece of research, it goes on to remind the reader that people have for some time been encouraged to take part in various community activities from school governors to collecting for a local charity.

Different views are sought in all sorts of business situations and this includes users of products as well as services. The older person also has particular views about access to services such as health, social care and housing services which are likely to be different to other age groups. Consequently older people have become one of the groups whose views are increasingly sought.

The research introduction makes reference to several research sources and explains the changing roles in research identifying the older person's possible role within the traditional professional research process. The paper identifies a range of social research theories and how they have been used as methodologies in varying research projects. There is a suspicion within the professional researcher body that using lay people as researchers introduces an uncontrolled element into research in general because there may be conflicts and tensions introduced when the researcher has experienced the issues being researched.

In all types of research there are always conflicts this may arise from adopting a particular research approach, there are conflicts arising from the agenda of the funding body and again with the methods adopted in dissemination. The issue of who is asked to respond to a research question also brings its own problems and this is an issue that has to be identified when the results are reported. There is a comprehensive section of the report on representation and the problems that have

to be taken into account to ensure that the research is not compromised.

When commenting on the research skills of older people (*The role of older people in social research p238 para. 3*)

'If older people may have greater involvement in research – whatever the aspect of participation – there will be a need to broaden the roles of all parties. Some people will need to acquire new skills and others reuse skills that may not have been used for some time. While some people will lack the confidence to be involved directly, others may be coping with specific physical difficulties regarding hearing, seeing and moving which need to be addressed to enable involvement. These issues all need to be recognised and built into the research design as they demand extra time and extra resources.'

There are several examples quoted in the report how older people have responded to involvement and importantly the teaching/training that has been developed to prepare people for the task.

In the conclusion a number of important points are made (*The role of older people in social research p242 conclusion*):

'Older people do not have to be service users whose participation is being encouraged through user involvement. In broadening this perspective it is apparent that there are many roles that older people may take with consequent knock-on effects for other paid researchers.'

'For those researching ageing and later life, the role of older people within this process will vary depending on the issue, the context, the funding and, fundamentally, the purpose being served by the research process.'

Our Comments

There are very interesting issues identified in this paper not alone being the suspicion

felt by a body of the academic research establishment, something we were warned

about at the BSG Conference. We did identify in our project that there are dangers in getting too involved in the interviewing process and getting drawn into the discussion, rather than listening. We also identified the importance of matching the training to the project so that the participants were not stretched beyond

their ability. It was clear that to some degree project planners had to adjust their training to ensure this need was met. Finally it was recognised the vital importance of having the project overseen by a professional to ensure that the results could be validated and the conclusions could be accepted with confidence.

Averil Osborn and Participatory Research – Lorna Warren and Tony Maltby

This paper reflects on the ideas and work of Averil Osborn especially on the involvement of older people in the research process. We felt it was important for us to comment on the benefactor that allowed us to carry out our modest research effort. In the introduction Osborn is quoted: 'the energy and money invested in social research is only well spent if its results are 'useful and usable' (Osborn and Willcocks 1990): that is, if they are widely disseminated, inform public debate and catalyse policy change.

Osborn was a prime mover in projects concerned with 'enabling' and 'empowering' older people in community development and in advocacy and information development. The paper highlights examples of Osborn's work but reveals the difficulties experienced in getting the research recognised and used. Attempts by in-house researchers to co-operate with users were dismissed because they were accused of reduced investigative rigour, interpretive honesty and fairness of reporting. (Osborn and Willcocks 1990).

Osborn claimed that dissemination was the most important part of effecting social change it could enable those less well placed to participate in making life changes for themselves and others. The paper goes on to say that she and Dianne Willcocks produced a Good Practice Guide in 1990. This said that the 'them and us' relationship between gerontologists and older people needed to be addressed, with the type and form of information made available to

different audiences. Dissemination, they concluded, was not an 'optional extra' but should be part of the research contract. Funding was an issue that Osborn was well aware of and realised that in difficult economic times and research budgets were likely to be cut when funds ran low and affected the delivery of essential services, even though research might disseminate examples of good practice and perhaps more effective service to the user. It is very difficult to justify subjective concepts such as 'quality of life' against more easily understood objective measures. The only way that this can be justified is to involve the receivers of services in decisions about the future organisation and development of these services.

The 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act, was a spur for Osborn to produce a set of guideline pamphlets. 'Consultation' was the word being used officially, but in - Taking Part in Community Care Planning – Osborn stated that *involvement* (Osborn's emphasis) was what groups should seek:

Being involved implies being active participants involved in community care planning, instead of passive respondents merely consulted about it influencing the shape and choice of services leading to better more use sensitive services. ('Why Consult?' pamphlet, p2 in Osborn 1991)

Summarising Osborn believed that relevant research could be used to 'help older

people to participate in social change' by giving force and credibility to their voices as 'consumers' empowering them to secure the maximum benefits from the changes around them, and helping them to become actively involved rather than adopting the role of bystander or social victim (Osborn and Willcocks 1990, p. 190).

Older people and participatory research is an issue that few commentators have tackled until recently, despite the many different models of involvement. (Carter and Beresford 2000). The paper indicates that when Osborn was writing, however user groups were organising and beginning to question research practice and researchers that themselves are either disabled or users of services now critique academic research.

Various user groups have developed their own research methods and methodologies using their own knowledge. Older people have been involved in these processes in various ways:

- in steering groups and as research advisers
- as originators of research questions
- in the collection and analysis of data
- in writing up and disseminating research findings

Since Osborn's death new policy overviews or forums on the needs of older people have been developed. The government has declared a commitment to improving older people's participation in public policy making, and a new 'learning network' will help the sharing of ideas and encourage local authorities and central government departments prepare for an aging

population (Department of Social Security 1998).

In June 1998 the Better Government for Older People Programme (BGOP 1999) was launched with the aim of improving public services for older people through local authority led inter-agency strategies and partnership with older people themselves. The report goes on to identify newly established groups for liaising with various government bodies. There are also opportunities for increased research funding through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The director of the new ESRC Growing Older research programme promised to raise the impact of findings on policy and practice (Walker 1999). Other existing research programmes on ageing, funded by the Nuffield and Joseph Rowntree Foundations, offer the possibility of a boost to UK research on services for older people. The report identifies the change in emphasis of in the preparation of research proposals and the increasing requirement to show how and to what extent service users have been involved in the drawing up of research proposals. (Warren 1999). On the other hand 'best value' is as much the emphasis as 'quality of life for users' when drawing up research proposals, so the inclusion of service users may be just a cosmetic exercise (Rappert 1997).

The aims of the Averil Osborn Fund in contrast, are centred primarily on the participation of older people in change. The research prospectus welcomes 'various methodologies and approaches' and 'applications from a wide range of disciplines, professions and vocations', though projects are expected to have the support of experienced researchers or have access to such experience and advice through a supporting institution. There follows descriptions of various Averil Osborn funded projects. A particular point made in these resumes is the problems associated in communicating effectively with older people in ethnic groups where language is a dual issue of confidence from

the user as well as the effective translation of the communication.

Conclusions – involving older people in research:

A number of research initiatives are referred to in describing the general use of users in research projects they seem to concentrate on user involvement where young people, ethnic minority groups or poor people. Although older people are aware that they have a lot of knowledge and experience to share, their views have seldom been sought or valued by government (Boaz, Hayden and Bernard 1999). We are still some way from the full involvement of older people in the research process, especially as the initiators of research.

Notwithstanding the shifting philosophies of welfare research (Williams et al 1999), there is still little commentary on or analysis of the effect of user involvement on research itself and of broader collaboration. Key concerns include the potential conflicts of interests among researchers, users, service providers and other relevant participants.

Crucially, participatory projects need to demonstrate how their results have fed into or influenced policy or practice (Carter and Beresford 2000).

Averil Osborn funded projects have illuminated several important issues including: how research outcomes are monitored and evaluated post-dissemination, the issue of the impact of the withdrawal of project workers on the lives of older participants and the sustainability of initiatives, the fact that not all older people want to be involved in

participatory research. Like other examples of action research initiatives are vulnerable to charges of being un-representative or subjective (Peace 1999).

Averil Osborn funded projects have made service providers in a Manchester project admit that contrary to their original opinion they did not know what older people wanted. (Toffaletti 1997a, p. 14)

Among the older participants, many learnt both that research skills 'are not a mysterious set of tasks that only highly trained academics can apply' (Peace 1999, p. 23) and that they can bring a new language to and have a voice in conveying the findings. Many have experienced an increase in self-confidence as a result. As Averil Osborn warned (1984) there is still scepticism amongst academics about participative research.

The Averil Osborn Fund can do little to overcome these hurdles directly. Its most important role is in supporting processes of involvement in provision and change. It is acting as a channel for the 'sharing of experience on how to do it, how not to do it and the sharing of success' ('Taking It On: Issues' pamphlet, p. 9, in Osborn 1991).

We chose to quote the foregoing research documents because they represented specific issues that are relevant to the core of our Research Project and to the types of projects that were reviewed by us. There are many similar reports but they did not add to the knowledge we gained from the Literature Review attached.

The Community Research Team - Project:

Research Team:

Anthony Gough – Team Leader

Mohammed Afzal

Graham Bagnall

Our mentor is Tony Maltby, senior lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

Methodology:

In our proposal we said that we would approach organisations that had used older people to conduct research projects. When we were considering the proposal we had identified the following researchers and organisations that had been active in this field and we proposed making contact with them in the following weeks to try and enlist their help: Dr Kate Bennett - University of Liverpool, Dr Sheila Peace - Open University, Prof. Mary Maynard - University of York, Pat Chambers - Keele University, Dr. Lorna Warren - University of Sheffield and, Dr Sam Taylor - University of Sheffield, University of East Anglia, University of Teesside, Gateshead Forum for Older People, Age Concern, and Help the Aged, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. We had set ourselves a tight schedule to complete our interview phase in order to present our preliminary findings at the B S G conference in September. We therefore decided to start making contact with

organisations that were a reasonable distance from Birmingham.

We decided that we would use semi structured interviews to obtain our data and we spent quite a lot of time designing the interview schedules. In spite of problems that might occur at the analysis phase, and against certain advice, we also decided to use open questions wherever possible. We felt that, particularly, the non academic subjects would feel more comfortable with this type of approach where there is no right or wrong answer and it would seem more like an informal conversation than an interview. We were equipped with good quality hand held recorders for recording our meetings. Although our intention was always to conduct one to one conversations with all our contacts we accepted the possibility of using focus groups if it was appropriate. In the event all were face to face, apart from 3 telephone interviews.

In our original proposal we had indicated that we would conduct a literature review to see what other work had been done in its field. On reflection we decided that as we were new to research we would avoid being led by previous findings and make comparisons after our work was completed.

To summarise our plan was:

- Decide our research strategy i.e. semi structured interviews.
- Develop our questions and our interview schedule / guide for Academic Research Leaders and Older Researchers.
- Plan our visit schedule based on numbers required and practical distances/ budget constraints. Visiting an Academic Establishment first to conduct an interview and determining how many older helpers would assist in our further research. Until we met our requirements.
- Arrange for a transcription service.
- Plan our analysis matrices mainly based on our original question plan but taking into account the responses.
- Carry out the initial analysis and map out preliminary conclusions.
- Plan initial presentation of findings for BSG Conference.

- The analysis phase was carried out by each of the participants independently although the same matrix was used. The final version is an amalgamation of the varying inputs. This ensured that the final report depended on a triangulation of views.
- Map out Final Report and trawl through all Interview Transcriptions for relevant quotations to illustrate significant points. It also allows the presentation of divergent views which might have emerged in a more extensive research project.
- We then developed our conclusions and tried to bring out ideas that we thought would be of interest to organisations who might be considering employing older people for Research or indeed for any other work requiring some intellectual ability combined with energy.
- We had been gathering details of other similar projects for possible comparison in our literature review and this was the point when we had the opportunity to “compare notes” and bring out similarities and divergences from our conclusions.

The investigation

Although this is not in strict chronological order we did start by interviewing academic research leaders and then asking them to provide a contact with the older people they had worked with.

The interview guides can be found in the appendices at the back of this report and the following is a summary of our conversations with academic researchers about the experience of working with older people.

At the beginning we asked about the research projects that they had worked on with older people being part of the research team. There were nine projects where older people were involved in the research process, two of these used a range of age groups but when it came to interviewing the non academic people we only spoke to the older age group. All of the projects dealt with issues of concern to older people. There was one additional project that involved research on an entire retirement

village community where there were no older researchers as such but a small

representative group acted as facilitators for the research team.

Results and Discussion

We asked why the research teams had decided to work with older people in a research capacity. The main response was that older people had an affinity for working on a project with an issue they recognised, in addition because the subjects of research were older people it was felt that people of the same generation would have a closer rapport with one another. One comment was ".... We thought the best thing would be to employ older people who have their own understanding of the concept and some appreciation of what we're talking about...."

and another "..... We thought it was likely that the older people have were part of the project being evaluated might find it easier to talk to other older people."

Yet another practical view "to be honest it was a bit strategic – that is definitely one element. and I felt that our potential sponsor would be interested in providing money for service led research."

It was of interest to find out how the researchers were recruited. There was an endless range of sources tapped in this quest, in the first place there were people involved in the research project such as Age Concern or Social Services, then via leaflets and advertisements through leaders of church groups, lunch clubs, libraries, community centres and through ethnic groups, the Irish centre, Chinese group etc. People used their local knowledge to try and target the age group or social mix required to represent the population.

When it came to find the out what makes older people suitable for research there was quite an interesting response range. In general the view was that older people are no different to younger researchers providing they are fit and meet any specific criteria. Old and young can make a complementary team although older people may have an advantage when researching older issues because they can connect and share experiences.

Responses included:

i) ".... they had clear views, if there was something to talk about; they were passionate about certain issues. Not necessarily political issues"

ii) and "I suppose you could refer them as the usual suspects. People who take part tend to be vocal, may be used to communicating, used to finding information in different ways"

iii) or "I would look for the same qualities as I would look for in any age; that's the ability to develop a good relationship with the person you are interviewing. You need to be able to express an interest in what people are talking about. To make people comfortable and prepared to talk."

We specifically asked if there were any disadvantages in working with older people but there was an overwhelmingly positive response for older researchers with just a word of caution about health and mobility which could of course occur at any age. Typically:

i) "I don't want to make that comparison because I don't think its age, per se, that's the difference. I think people feel people's willingness, people's preparedness to work to a particular approach. I don't think older people are any better or worse at that."

When we asked how older people compare with younger researchers the main comments was that that the research teams should be selected according to the nature of the project. People have a rapport with others in a similar age group if the topic is to of interest to both parties there can be a good connection. The other aspect to consider is that there may be differing points of view depending on the age group and therefore balanced research may specifically require a range of ages to ensure a balanced outcome. Half of the projects we researched specifically used older people for the research.

Training

In view of the importance of training we asked what training was involved in preparing researchers for their role in their project. It was clear that there was a wide variation depending on what was appropriate for the task involved. Some work just needed a clear briefing document with examples of the type of output required, another held a twenty-four hour long briefing session including a comprehensive manual and information leaflets to provide a consistent approach. Where interviews were involved quite comprehensive training was deemed to be appropriate. This included an outline of social research, research methods, and ethics, the difference between qualitative and quantitative data, plus interview techniques and role play. Generally these courses lasted for seven to 10 days spread over a few weeks. Some of the courses were modified in their delivery style and content to ensure they were

The number of researchers used ranged between two up to 50 with a one national project involving over 100 people.

The age range of researchers varied between 17 and 90. The youngest ages were involved in the social observation study where every age range was represented and every age range studied in the selected Urban Spaces. The exact age split was not recorded but we only had conversations with people over 50. The average age of the people we interviewed would-be 60 plus.

The validity of the data is important so we asked how the research teams maintained consistency. Predominantly this was achieved by a careful training programme, involvement in the research project and a clear guide or interview schedule.

appropriate for the people attending. There were also opportunities for revisiting certain aspects either on an individual or group basis; perhaps as a result of feedback during the implementation stage.

One of the most important aspects of the training was involvement in the actual project itself as it was important that everyone believed in it and the work involved and essentially they were confident that the outcome would be beneficial.

Detail points covered in some training included how-to handle issues such as deafness, poor sight and behaviour when dealing with interviewees. There are also issues involving setting up the interview and putting the subject at ease before starting the interview / conversation.

Younger people:

We asked whether any younger people had been used in the research, five of the projects only worked with older people the remaining three used a mixed age group.

There were quite varying responses when we asked about the main differences between young and older researchers; however the general view that there was little difference. One view was that different age groups create different dynamics so you can get a different slant on the same issue. This aspect was particularly mentioned in the observation study where there were several different perspectives and interpretations of observations

Working with Older People

The final most important question was - would you use older researchers again? There was a universal positive response to this question and all the academic researchers would work with older people on future projects without any doubt. There are several points that are worth quoting from the transcriptions:

- i) "one of the things I have been saying is that I think that it is particularly helpful to work with older people when researching topics for older people,"

between young and old when looking at the same situation together.

The following quotation perhaps encapsulates the overall impression:

i) " I am reluctant to use age as a factor for the difference. I think what makes a good interviewer, as I say, is somebody to express an interest in what people are saying, make people feel comfortable talking, without actually pushing them to say a particular thing. Those are skills that young people have, older people have - that you can be trained in and so, as I say, I am reluctant say that age is a factor that will make a difference."

- ii) , "..... in a situation there could be value in older people conducting the interview as away of demonstrating practically that older people have the confidence to do that. And also because again older people could draw on their personal experiences to push and probe that might not have come from a younger person."

Part two

Working for a research group:

After we had spoken to the professional researchers at University we sought permission to approach the older people that they had worked with. We were conscious of the time constraints that we had placed on ourselves for completion of

the project and we decided that if we were able to interview (have a 'structured conversation' with) 6 or more subjects we would be satisfied. In the event we conducted 14 interviews.

The following describes the responses we obtained from these groups of volunteers 13 in total:

We wanted to find out how all the older people had to get into research, we found the answers to be quite varied although most of them did have some contact with organisations associated with older people. In the main people were doing some sort of part time or voluntary work and were approached directly or indirectly by the research organisations. For instance, there were three of the volunteers that were members of "an over-fifties forum" and saw a leaflet about a research opportunity and

decided to reply. Two other people were working in different offices and they were approached by a researcher. The following is a typical quote:

i) "I was on the 'Better Government for Older People', that was at the Town Hall. I was asked if I would like to be involved, well at the time we would do anything. We did loads of voluntary work and we did this, and it was brilliant"

Reaction from Older People to Older Researchers

It was interesting to try and gauge what reaction the volunteers had experienced from older people when they carried out their research project. None of them experienced any adverse reaction and they felt comfortable that there was a strong empathy between themselves and their subjects and they enjoyed the chance to

talk to someone. There was a strongly held belief that the training had helped to build up their confidence both in themselves and the topic they were researching.

i) "So by going out to older ladies I think we could empathise with some of the things that they – the issues that they brought up."

How did Older People feel about conducting research

It was important to determine what sort of benefit accrued to them for all the hard work, particularly as the majority of the people that we interviewed were

volunteers. The top two responses were first that they found the research interesting and stimulating and secondly most people just enjoyed meeting people. The training

developed their interest and to be part of the team and to meeting new people some of whom became friends gives a rounded feel to the experience.

i) "We all share our opinions and feelings and get together and do things. It's

Did you get honest answers?

Carrying out research is one thing but been confident that you're getting good honest responses is very important to a project. Clearly this is something that had been talked about by in the developments of the research project because they had thought about the outcome and had developed a question pack that could be answered in an informal way. The "interview" was in an informal chat so there was a relaxed atmosphere. Only one person mentioned

Would a younger person get better results?

Having a younger person carrying out the interview might have been a possibility and we wondered whether any of the older people thought that a younger person could have got more from the research. Perhaps unsurprisingly the reaction was that to there would be more empathy between older people and perhaps an older person would be more constrained by a younger person. Younger people would be able to handle closed questions perhaps although it is possible that some younger

Encouraging older people into research

It would be good to encourage a greater number of older people to use their experience in these research projects, stimulate their interest and to make a difference. We wanted to see if any of the people we talk to had any constructive ideas on how this could be achieved. Making the initial contact is of course the most difficult issue and apart from advertisements and notice boards there

opened a lot of doors really. The research has been interesting, we do it as a team. And I look forward to the meetings and everything else that comes up."

that they had experienced the situation where they were considered nosy and initially thought be something to do with it the Government.

i) "oh yes. It's amazing, you don't have to ask a question half the time they give you the answers. Even though sometimes they might think, what's going to come out of it?They are just people chatting generally."

people who had been used to dealing with older relatives would be able to more easily develop a response that brought out their interest.

i) "..... My idea that if you are speaking to people in your own age group, they as you have been there done that. You may have an idea what their life is like. Older people may feel patronised by younger people and look at them and think, I know what you want to hear, I will tell you what you want."

was no specific suggestion. There was some conversation afterwards about making formal or informal presentations at community centres etc. Once contact has been made explaining the benefits off getting together as a team, providing a challenging project and having regular conversations on past achievements will help to stimulate the interest.

Training Older People

In a number of previous questions the importance of training was touched on so we asked specifically what benefit researchers got from the training. The majority of the people we spoke to found many aspects of Social Research really interesting, interviewing techniques were specifically mentioned even by people who had some experience. In addition to these technical aspects many of them saw their confidence grow and they enjoyed the experience of being part of a team doing a worthwhile job.

- i) “Sometimes you tend to look at people who are in high powered jobs that they are beyond your reach but they’re not. They’re just the same as us, and you know it was nice to be all one instead of them and us.”
- ii) Another “Well it gave me confidence, and it highlighted a lot of things

that I had not really thought about before. And the confidence it gave us – somebody listened to what we had to say. The professional people didn’t just come in well this is it, we also had an input. That meant a lot to us.”

- iii) One person made this comment about the format of the training; “I think to be honest the main part for everyone was the interviewing. The rest of it, we spent too much time in too much detail. In retrospect we could have done with that afterwards. in the training of interviewing we could have discussed the type of questions we wanted to ask. “

Was the training appropriate?

Everyone thought that the training they had been given was appropriate for the challenge they were faced with although there were a number of interesting issues about the training itself. When we spoke to the professional researchers one had mentioned that their training programme had been modified slightly. The volunteers were dissatisfied with their trainers and the progress being made. Some of the issues came clear when we talked to the older people themselves. People newly out of education and indeed older graduates will have been involved in a totally different teaching experience from people brought up in the 1950s where there was total discipline, the teacher delivered the topic, and he or she was always right. In spite of these perceived faults they did have the

benefit of plain English without acronyms and obscure technical phrases. The message was don’t be patronising about our education but be conscious that we have the experience of life and we are capable of doing a good job if you communicate with us.

- i) “Training it wasn’t like going back to school also I think we all found it very difficult because we had the old school where you would be taught. You were told what to do, you were told what to wear and it is totally different frame of learning in that you participate and you present the questions and find the answers at the same time; a very alien way of learning anything. I think it took a little bit of getting used to.”

Would you do it again?

The people we spoke to had conducted up to 10 interviews each and those involved in the public place survey had done over a hundred observations in a study taking over nine months.

Our final question, perhaps the most important, was 'Would you do it again?', in spite of one person who found the work too time consuming, the resounding answer was yes. Without exception the people we spoke to enjoyed the work and found that it

was stimulating and provided a worthwhile conclusion.

We did make an informal study of the range of people doing this work and they varied from lecturers to barmaids, office workers to engineers. It just shows the range of talent that is available in the older generation and this could be tapped for almost any sort of job. Training is not just something for young people.

Conclusions:

Because of the limited extent of this study we can only claim that the following comments give indicative conclusions, we hope our literature review will put our research into context.

In order to reach our conclusion we will set out the objectives of our Research Project to set against the results achieved. What is the Role and Purpose of Research carried out by Older People.

In most cases the objective of the research was to glean information from groups of older people by using semi-structured interviewing techniques or "guided conversations" to this end the research organisers organised training courses.

The outcomes were successful using older people thus demonstrating the suitability of this age group. The fact that all the university teams would tap this resource again demonstrates their confidence and there was an equally positive response from the older participants.

The outcomes of the research have led to an increase in knowledge about the needs of older people which has been disseminated to local and national government bodies. One research group felt that there was not enough feedback of results either during or after the project.

We have found our project very interesting and hope that some of our findings will be of value even though this is a very small project with insignificant sampling of the overall picture. We will carry out a literature review to see if any of our conclusions are mirrored in other research, this may validate our work or perhaps open up an idea for further investigation.

Matching training to the project was identified as an important requirement by the research leaders perhaps we have identified an additional issue to take into account and that is the educational experience of the older researchers particularly teaching methods. Learning is a cumulative experience, professionals should accept that experience gained "on

the job” is valuable and the more the resource is used the more valuable it is.

The main differences between older and younger people from a research point of view are the “useful” differences in experience. The older people have a lifetime of experience this means they are

Other Outcomes:

Should the experience gained by Older Researchers be used for further work?
Should there be a register of Researchers?

The training experienced was useful for the older people in a number of ways particularly developing personal confidence and increasing their knowledge of their local area. This is in addition to the needs of the project they were working on. It is

used to interacting with both older and younger people. Young people are likely to be more mobile perhaps more experienced with modern equipment and have a different perspective on many things. The synergy of these differences could be useful in a research context.

really important to ensure this expertise is not lost. Based upon the findings of this research we **recommend** that there should be a register developed in order that a core of “experts” can be tapped. This could be sponsored by the Averil Osborn Fund and monitored by the BSG. This is an issue that was mentioned by both Research Leaders and Older Researchers alike.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Project summaries

Equal Forward development partnership – Older Workers Project* - Birmingham University, Tony Maltby, Martin Ogilvy funded by the European Social Fund

The project was local to Birmingham and Solihull and its purpose was to develop, test and deliver mainstream models of intervention focused on Access, retention and Progression in relation to the labour market.

Funding for the project was via the EQUAL European Social Fund Community Initiative and the partnership involved in implementation included local agencies such as Age Concern Birmingham and Job Centre Plus with the University of Birmingham directing the research.

Older workers Project Outline;

The core principals of the project were encouragement of Access, Retention and Progression of Older workers (age 50+) in paid employment as well as those who although economically active may describe themselves as retired. The key focus of the project design was to ensure meaningful participation of 'older workers' with an 'action research' outlook. The project hoped to facilitate a change in employer's attitudes and perceptions about 'older workers', particularly those from SME's (where research has demonstrated little impact). There was also the added dimension of adding to and developing employment based skills and motivation of older people in paid and unpaid work. The final aim was to try and combat the pernicious and widespread ageism that exists and seek to encourage equality of opportunity across other social divisions

such as ethnicity, gender, sex and disability already legislated against.

Project Implementation;

- 1) Older workers sub-group met to determine approach, design of project, design of (scientifically based) research and internal evaluation, the appointment of the researcher and the recruitment of the larger sample of beneficiaries and from those, the 50+ team.
- 2) Compilation of a 'state of the art' discussion paper and review of current literature to develop the next phase.
- 3) The researcher then developed discussion groups to hear and comment on the discussion paper. All the groups would be recorded and the resulting information transcribed for analysis.
- 4) The participative research phase involved selected people from the pool of older people involved being trained in interviewing skills to allow them to carry out interviewing of older people. Those selected would hold a recognised research qualification and could also have additional training in computing and qualitative data analysis.
- 5) The outcomes of the resulting research would be discussed with interested parties on an ongoing basis.

Saying Hello Project, researching loneliness in older people – University of Salford & Age Concern*

This project was based in the Borough of Wigan and involved the local Age Concern Office who provided the research volunteers, the University of Salford who arranged the training and the professional research direction and 'The Lottery Fund'. The purpose of the project was to find out through personal stories:

- How people coped positively when faced with loneliness.
- How they coped with isolation.

- Their views on how older people could be helped to manage loneliness better.

All the volunteers attended a comprehensive course to help them to understand how social research was conducted. They were involved in developing the format for the interview schedule and were trained in interviewing skills. As the project developed they were involved in data analysis and finally in the dissemination of the project findings.

“ROAD” Research on Age Discrimination – Open University. Bill Bytheway.

The RoAD Project is investigating how age discrimination is experienced by older people, and how it affects all our lives. A particular emphasis is on forms of discrimination which are neglected in the media despite being a common experience for older people. The project is developing tools and strategies for challenging ageist behaviour and promoting a more age-inclusive society.

RoAD is being undertaken by a team based in the Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies (CABS) of the Faculty of Health & Social Care at The Open University, in collaboration with Help the Aged and with the financial support of the Big Lottery Fund.

The project started in July 2004 and will last for two years.

Aims

To investigate how age discrimination is experienced by, and how it affects the lives of, older people, and to develop tools and strategies that will challenge ageist behaviour and promote a more age-inclusive society.

Accounts of the experience of age discrimination

A key objective of RoAD is to collect accounts of the experience of age discrimination.

What is 'an experience of age discrimination'?

People experience age discrimination in all sorts of ways. Of particular interest to us are those occasions when someone is made aware or suspect that they are being denied something because they are 'too old'. This may follow an exchange with an

official or acquaintance, or it may result from an official form that has to be completed.

Some people may have experiences to report of 'positive' age discrimination:

- 'Yes you can have [X] because you are old enough'.

This implies that others might be judged 'too young'. We would like to hear about such discrimination even though our priority is gathering evidence of discrimination *against* older people.

Throughout the project we hope to receive accounts of various forms of ageism. However, we are especially keen to obtain evidence of *acts* of discrimination, no matter how subtle or well disguised these might have been. Such 'acts' may include the way in which a person speaks, their behaviour or their attitude when dealing with an older person.

What kind of 'account'?

We are happy to receive an account in any form. Ideally, we would like it in writing since that is how we will store it. So, if you phone us, or recount your experience in the course of a meeting or interview, we will produce a written version.

The kind of account we want is what journalists might call 'the story': a blow-by-blow description of what actually happened, with all the relevant detail but only the minimum of background information.

We are particularly keen to gather firsthand accounts. If you are describing your own experience then please offer some detail on how you *felt*, as well as what you were thinking, at the time. We would also like to know what the outcomes of this experience were and what, if any, action you took as a result.

Project outcomes

Some people have extensive experience of age discrimination. They find themselves in difficult and hostile situations and nearly every day includes a battle against ageist prejudice. You might be 'spoilt for choice'. If so, your experience is particularly important. We may offer to visit you and help you identify particular experiences that are unusual or especially challenging.

Essentially what we need, if RoAD is to show the way towards a more age-inclusive society, are accounts of less familiar forms of age discrimination, experiences that younger people have difficulty in grasping.

The team

Sheila Peace, Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Health & Social Care

Bill Bytheway, RoAD Project Director

Caroline Holland, Research Associate

Richard Ward, Researcher

Irene Paton, Research Secretary

“The Last Refuge” revisited continuity and change in residential care for older people – University of Bristol, Randall Smith, Julia Johnson and Sheena Rolph.

This project is an extensive National Project following up the research carried out on residential care in Britain by Peter Townsend in 1962. Part of the research involves revisiting those homes, that Townsend and colleagues visited, that are still functioning as care homes in 2005/6. The follow up research replicates Townsend's methods and looks at the

extensive photographic data which was used in the research.

Recruitment of older people for this project started with the 'University of the Third Age', retired academics and local history societies. Local knowledge has been useful in tracking down buildings that have been rebuilt or now exist in a different application.

Older Women's Lives and Voices: Participation and Policy in Sheffield – Lorna Warren and Tony Maltby and Joe Cook*

This research initiative was funded by the ESRC as part of the Growing Older Research Programme on Extending Quality of Life.

The aim of the project is to raise awareness of issues affecting the quality of life of older women across different ethnic groups and their involvement in services available to them. The study has involved women from Black-Caribbean, Chinese,

Irish, Somali and White British communities in Sheffield. It has used a participatory research strategy. Older women have taken part in designing and carrying out the research and continue to be involved in disseminating findings and promoting change. (This work is also featured in the literature review.)

New lifestyles in old age, Health, identity and well-being in Berryhill Retirement Village. Mirriam Bernard, Bernadette Bartlam, Simon Biggs and Julius Sim

This project involved investigating the working of a purpose built retirement village similar to those that have been around in North America and Europe for some time.

The study began in June 2000, two years after the village opened in May 1998. A multi-method, participatory action research approach was adopted using a number of interrelated strategies to gather data over the course of three years. The study encompassed informal methods, such as participant observation, as well as highly structured techniques, such as the

administration of three annual waves of questionnaires to residents.

A notable feature of the study's design was the close involvement of participants in the research process. Residents in particular contributed to the thinking and understanding of the research team through their inputs to participation groups and the annual community conference; liaison meetings were held every two months between the village management, a representative of the managing organisation and the research team.

Social Interaction in Urban Public Places – Sheila Peace, Caroline Holland, Andrew Clash and Jeanne Katz, Open University funded by the Joseph Rowntree foundation.*

This participative project involved people of all ages in mixed variable groups observing

how people carry out their informal business throughout the day in an Urban

setting. The research was carried out in Aylesbury and used School Children, Students, as well as Young and Older people both male and female. The groupings were informal possibly friends, husband & wife or grouped together by the research team.

Those participating attended training courses on observation and recording and

the results were discussed and collected by the research team. An interesting point arising from the use of a mixed age range is the way that different perspectives were recorded for the same observations depending on the age of the observer. This is an important lesson to learn about research and about the dangers of age discrimination.

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Marrian Barnes

University of Bristol
Randall Smith

University of Salford
Barbara Walmsley
Researchers from Age Concern Wigan
Barbara, Jean, Joan, Elaine, Jude

University of Sheffield
Lorna Warren
Researchers
Jean W, Jean, Pamela

Further copies of this report can be requested from: gough39@hotmail.com

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