




Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



Powers and Frailties of Old Age: “I Am Still Quite Capable for my Age” (Mrs. H., 92 years).

REFERENCE

Charpentier, M., & Soulières, M. (2007). Powers and Frailties of Old Age: “I Am Still Quite Capable for my Age” (Mrs. H., 92 years). *Nouvelles Pratiques Sociales*, 19(2), 128-143.

TEXT TYPE

Format: Scientific article

Content: Empirical

DISCUSSED THEMES

Vulnerabilities, barriers to reporting, empowerment (power to act) of seniors residents, life trajectory and admission of the resident, perception of the nursing homes' environment, rights and power to act on a daily basis, strategies of residents.

GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This article discusses the meaning given by seniors living in nursing homes to the concept of power, in connection with their personal experiences. It also explores the various strategies put forward by the local residents to exercise their power on a daily basis.

PROBLEM

Several challenges come with the increase of the oldest old, particularly on their specific needs, as well as on the adaptation of nursing homes. The community living environments for seniors had to face many negative depictions which affect their image and lead to growing concerns in connection with life conditions and care as well as the risk of mistreatment. However, older people should not be seen only as victims, but also as actors with real power to act on their own lives.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was conducted with 20 older people (15 women and 5 men) living in institutional settings (public and private long term health care facilities [CHSLD]), private residences and intermediate housing resources). Two interviews were conducted with each of the residents. The first addressed the life trajectory and admission, the expectations, the schedule and the suggestions that he/she would make to a new resident. The second rather focused on the rights of the residents and the concept of power. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded before being analyzed according to three themes: the life trajectory and admission, the perception of the living environment, as well as the rights and the power to act on a daily basis.

RESULTS

Results suggest that strategies used by residents in order to exercise their power to act (empowerment) in their everyday living show the continuity with their life trajectory. They mostly rely on avoidance. In addition, the importance of social ties is clearly demonstrated by this study. Results also indicate that older people are aware of the context of vulnerability in which they are in.

DISCUSSION

The empowerment must be viewed in reflections and practices among seniors living in nursing homes. However, we must avoid the dichotomy between power and dependence that often surrounds the notion of empowerment and rather promote the development of various strategies used by the residents. Following the analysis of the interviews, there were four standard profiles of residents: the prisoner (resident who survives, but with a feeling of being sentenced), the resident who is under someone else's authority (leaving everything in the hands of God, or other), the wiser one (who is aging gracefully and who accepts the losses) as well as that the independent one (who tries to maintain the autonomy left in her/him and also her/his rights and freedoms).

CONCLUSION

Finally, it is important to maintain a comprehensive view of the aging population, as well as services and different living environments offered to seniors. This study helps to indicate the subjective vision of the residents within the macrosocial context in which the vision lies and to better understand the constraints surrounding the empowerment of these older people whose dominant social representations encourage them to remain passive. Strategies developed by the residents were intended to preserve their social ties and services provided to them.

AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Several recommendations are made: let the seniors speak freely and take the time to listen to them, let them be involved in decisions that would affect them, avoid the constant relocation in different living environments, when possible, keep a sharp eye and take action on situations of violence in nursing homes and promote the empowerment of older people.

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