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Ageing Well at Different Standards of Living:
Experiences of Older People

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Abstract

Current approaches to ageing are concerned with promoting positive ageing, and messages around how best to age are prominent in contemporary society. However, there has been debate regarding whether these models foster a positive experience in later life or serve to discriminate and disempower those older people who are unable to meet the standards of positive ageing. One criticism is that promoting positive ageing ignores the many inequalities within society that impact on older people’s ability to age in these socially acceptable ways. In addition, these models may fail to capture what is important to older people themselves, instead emphasising characteristics which are more concerned with the economic implications of an ageing population. The present study addressed these criticisms by examining what older people themselves value as important in order to age well, within the material conditions they are situated. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, transcripts from eight participants over the age of 79 were analysed. The participants in this study valued continuity, having a sense of security, being able to engage in reciprocal relationships, and being able to live within their means. While some of these aspects of later life were valued by all the participants in similar ways, others were clearly impacted by the participant’s standards of living. This finding highlights the need to take into account inequalities in society when focusing on older peoples experiences of later life.
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