

How Does The Life Course Influence The Meaning Of Home For Six Baby Boomers?.

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Introduction

The number of people aged over 65 is increasing alongside an increase in solo living (Demey et al 2013). The UK Government emphasis is on enabling people to age in place (Department of Health 2006). Findings from a PhD study revealed the various factors that could influence the meaning of home for six baby boomers, that is those born c1945-1965.

During the life course of the baby boomers there have been significant cultural and social factors that could influence their meaning of home. For example the changing demographic patterns, namely birth rate, marital/cohabitating arrangements, increase in divorce and increased life expectancy all impact upon the living arrangements in later life. (Evandrou and Falkingham 2000; Glaser 1997). Living arrangements, availability of support and social interaction all influence quality of life, which could influence the meaning of home. Lloyd (2008) suggests that relationships may be limited or constrained as a result of these extended families.

Life Course Factors Influencing the Meaning of Home



Methods

The six participants in the study were asked to take photographs of 'home', whatever that meant to them, this participatory led method reduces the power base of the researcher (Woolrych and Sixsmith 2011) and encourage an uninterrupted story of the meaning of home. The participant's stories of home inevitably leads to the sharing of their personal biography, and helped the researcher consider how the life course might have influenced the participants meaning of home.

Findings

- Anticipation or experience of life transitions leads to a re-examination of the meaning of home.
- Anticipation of the effects of growing older can influence the meaning of home.
- The effect of illness during the life course can be a significant transition for individuals and influence their meaning of home.
- The death of a parent(s) is a major life transition with long term influences on an individual feeling at home.
- Relationships with families, friends and the local community were keenly expressed as being integral elements for the meaning of home.
- Home is very important regardless of ownership status.
- The divide between the rich and poor influences choices about aging in place.

Participant Comments

"And it's just daunting, it's just a daunting feeling because I don't want to leave, I don't want to leave. And although I'll transfer staying in the area. I don't want to leave this house really" Barbara

"And I work from home and haven't got a lot of work at the moment, and so I'm finding it more of a... cage...than a...not a cage. More of a I don't know. I'm reassessing what I think about home. Always to me when I've been working it has been the place that you come home to at the end of the day". Ruth

"I just couldn't stay here if anything happened to you" [husband], not because of the memories, but because it's just too big. But it wouldn't worry me, I don't think. I'm saying this, emotionally it would go away. I would be happy to move elsewhere as long as I had certain things around me. Mainly being the family I think" Tessa

"I had a real hard time that day when I dropped him off at the bus stop... it was weird, it was really peculiar because he sort of, it was the first time he caught the bus to grammar, and it was the first time, really, that he caught the bus.... So as I dropped him off, he walked around to the other side of the bus stop and he just stood there on the end, on his own, in his uniform, with all his bags. And I was sort of driving off up the road thinking God, you know, that it bloody tore my heart strings a bit, really" Paul

Discussion

The six participants in this study shared an insight into how their life course could have influenced their meaning of home. If some conclusions can be drawn from this small group of stories, they are these:

Five of the six participants owned their homes, indicative of the **increase opportunities to be become homeowners** during their life course. The divide however between the richest and poorest has also grown significantly. Barbara lives in housing association home and her fears of having to move when her children leave home have been heightened because of the so called Bedroom Tax. This reduction in security and choice affects her meaning of home.

Work and employments opportunities and choices have dramatically changed during the life course of this cohort, including an increase in the number of people working at home. This could have significant implications for the building of social networks important for well-being. And for Ruth is made home feel like a 'cage' at times and feeling 'hemmed in'.

Life transitions such as changes in health status, death of parents, children leaving home and children starting secondary school can cause anxiety and affect the wellbeing of individuals. Tessa is still grieving for the loss of her parents several years before' This highlighted concerns around being able to die at home which can be compromised by insufficient support available to enable people to die where they choose. Three of the participants expressed the sense of loss associated with their children leaving home or the anticipation of them leaving home. This is a significant time in the life course and can influence a sense of self and wellbeing.

References :

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