

## Successful Ageing & TOMNET

Older ageing is described in many ways - healthy ageing, active ageing, positive ageing, productive ageing. The one that may incorporate aspects of these is probably successful ageing.

But is successful ageing an oxymoron, where two apparently contradictory terms are combined? Is there such a thing as ageing that is successful? TOMnet believes that there is, both actually and potentially, as evidenced in its membership. Of course, successful ageing means different things to different people and it is how this is perceived and understood that gives the term its meaning. For example, as someone has said, "Its adding life to years; not just adding more years to life".

Consider a few aspects of successful ageing. Rowe and Kahn (1997) refer to three components: low probability of disease and disease- related disability; high cognitive and physical functional capacity; and active engagement with life. It is this combination that makes for an understanding of successful ageing. It is not only the absence or presence of disease that is important but also protective and risk factors for disease that require attention.

The functional levels tell of a person's capacity for activity both of what they can do and what they are actually doing. While active engagement in life takes many forms, interpersonal relationships are at the centre. Productive activity where contacts and transactions with others occur, information is exchanged, emotional support and direct assistance are experienced are important. This is one way of thinking about the success or otherwise of ageing.

According to Vaillant and Mukamal (2001) older ageing can be seen in three ways: there is ageing with basic connotations of decline where decline militates against success.; there is ageing that means (inevitable) change, a neutral meaning with either positive or negative ramifications or a combination of both; then, ageing conveys experience of development and maturation where our capacity to enjoy life remains undiminished. Successful ageing therefore may be viewed from each or all of these perspectives at different times, resulting from the individual's real life experience and perception at the time.

Bowling and Dieppe (2005) refer to two models of defining successful ageing - biomedical and psychosocial. The biomedical model emphasizes the optimisation of life expectancy while minimising physical and mental deterioration and disability. Consequently, they focus on the absence of chronic disease, good health, high levels of independent functioning, performance, mobility and cognitive functioning.

Psychosocial models emphasize life satisfaction, social participation and functioning and psychological resources, including personal growth. Satisfaction includes zest, resolution and fortitude, happiness, relationship between desired and achieved goals, self concept, morale, mood and overall wellbeing. It encompasses high levels of social functioning, positive interactions, and social and reciprocal participation in society.

The psychosocial resources required for successful ageing include: a positive outlook and self worth, self efficiency and a sense of control over one's life, autonomy, independence and effective coping and adaptive strategies in the face of changing circumstances.

Bowling and Dieppe (2005) provide some useful dot points to help us appreciate the nature successful ageing. They identify theoretical definitions and also what ordinary lay people think about the subject.

#### **Main constituents of successful ageing**

- Life expectancy
- Life satisfaction and well being (includes happiness and contentment)
- Mental and psychological health, cognitive function
- Personal growth, learning new things
- Physical health and functioning, independent functioning.
- Psychological characteristics and resources including perceived autonomy, control, independence, adaptability, coping, self esteem, positive outlook, goals, sense of self.
- Social community, leisure activities, integration and participation, activity.

#### **Additional lay-persons' definitions**

- Accomplishments
- Enjoyment of diet
- Financial security
- Neighbourhood
- Physical appearance
- Productivity and contribution to life
- Sense of humour
- Sense of purpose
- Spirituality.

Successful ageing is a reality. How we experience it, perceive it, or pursue it is an individual and personal matter. However, TOMNET's mission is to promote successful ageing. Its membership provides more than ample evidence that the men are either adding more life to their years or are as adding more years to their life, or both. Such is life.

#### **References**

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