INVESTIGATING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE OLDER PERSON IN THE MIDLANDS REGION, IRELAND

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Societies are ageing at an unprecedented rate (OECD, 2015). There is a rapid demographic transformation with the older person happening nationally and internationally. By 2041, there will be 1.4 million people in Ireland aged 65 and over, three times more than the present older population (CSO, 2007, 2012). Social capital is strongly associated with social participation, mutual trust and reciprocity (Ahnquist et al., 2012). While the theory of social capital is now well developed and investigated, its relationship and relevance to older people is less clear (Smith et al. 2002). This study investigates the relationship between the variables of age, gender, education, quality of life, self-reported physical and mental health, and their association with social capital in a group of people aged over 65 years in the Midlands Region of Ireland. The study used a quantitative method of survey design. Data was collected from a representative sample (n= 195), using a self-administered survey via a General Practitioner in a primary health care environment. The survey measured the frequency of the older person’s participation in civic engagement, volunteering, reciprocity, trust, social networks, religion, levels of loneliness, along with connecting with family and friends. Preliminary findings highlight the important role of education, good self-rated health, religion and gender as positive predictors of the level of social capital produced and consumed. The findings of this study will provide relevant data on the importance and significance of the contribution of social capital to the wellbeing of the older person in an Irish context.

Biography

Anne Cooney is the Health Promotion Officer at AIT. Her background lies in health care both as a practitioner and in promoting health through information, creating opportunities and programmes enabling people to take control over, and improve their health. (RGN, CM, Higher diploma Oncology, Post graduate certificate in Health Promotion). She has recently completed an MSc by research.

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