Exploring leisure, social participation in older adults.

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Abstract

Older adults often face challenges in meaningful occupations in their neighbourhoods, often tied to place-based barriers and changes including neighbourhood decline or gentrification. The objectives of this study are to draw on findings from an ethnographic study exploring older adults’ lives in their neighbourhoods, in order to contextually situate the diverse experiences of older adults as they engage in community occupations, focusing on social participation and leisure. We employed an ethnographic methodology with 38 older adults living in two neighbourhoods in a mid-sized Canadian city. Participants engaged in narrative interviews, photo elicitation interviews, go-along interviews, and activity-space mapping with follow-up interviews. We analyzed data using thematic and data visualization techniques. Through this, we found that neighbourhood changes were often connected to decreases in social and leisure engagement by participants, sometimes tied to loss of spaces for informal social participation. Available occupational opportunities were often perceived as for ‘seniors’, an identity that many participants rejected. Participants also experienced exclusion from sites of social and leisure occupations, often based on social identities related to income, length of residency in the neighbourhood, language, gender, ability, and marital status. Participants also actively negotiated spaces and relationships to create occupational opportunities and a sense of belonging. Our findings thus highlight that there is a need to foster diverse, inclusive neighbourhood opportunities for occupational engagement among older adults. Collaboration is needed to identify, develop and advocate for such opportunities, such as developing local spaces into places of informal occupational engagement or improving existing opportunities.

**Keywords:** older adults, old age, seniors, leisure, participation, exclusion, inclusion, social spaces, aging in place.
Who are Older Adults?

- Young-old: 65-74
- Middle-old: 75-84
- Old-old: 85 – 89
- Frail-old: 90+
Monolithic Views of Older Adults

**Structural lag** in an increasingly aging population

**Over-medicalization** of ageing in scientific literatures
Therefore reinforcing the importance of studies focusing on older adults’ lives in their communities.

**De-prioritization** of the needs of older adults due to anti-aging sentiments & ageism
Monolithic Views of Older Adults (cont’d)

Recent diversity & inclusion efforts purport the importance of intersectionality in qualitative research. This is especially important considering the focus of this paper – which involves analyzing the relationship older adults in East London have in their natural and built environments, and social spheres. Experiences of aging are dependent on a number of identity-related factors such as: marital status, race, income, time spent living in the neighbourhood, and physical mobility.

Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on older adults in two communities in East London – trying to understand the aging experience as a result of the specific characteristics of these two neighbourhoods. Therefore, the results of this study should be applied according to the alignment of the various characteristics of a given community, and the two neighbourhoods involved in this study.
Overview of Methods

1. Literature review
   Databases: CINAHL, PubMed, SCOPUS

2. Creating the code list
   24 codes were used to sort through the data

3. Coding the primary data using *Nvivo* software

4. Report Generation & Analysis Stage
Understanding East London

East London, which was formerly a separate township, was amalgamated into the City of London in the 1990s. The area has since experienced immense transition from functioning as a close-knit a rural community to becoming an urban landscape – both in the social and built environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old East Village</th>
<th>Argyle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural and leisure hub; The Market, Aeolian Hall, Palace Theatre, etc.</td>
<td>• Notable features: Argyle Mall, Fanshawe Conservation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased gentrification</td>
<td>• Working class &amp; middle class population</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
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**Literature Review**

**Keywords: aged, qualitative, recreation, leisure, social, occupation**

Keywords: These keywords, used in conjunction with Boolean operators, were used to filter through occupational therapy and aging journals in order to assess the scope to which this topic has been studied. The articles were derived mainly from CINAHL, PubMed, and SCOPUS.

The results indicated that while there was existing literature about older adults and their engagement with social participation and community mobility, there are few focusing on **leisure and social activities**. Social participation in these studies were generally addressed through the lens of health and wellness, accessibility, or the providence of social services in underserved communities. The following articles were deemed the most relevant for our purposes.

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**Barriers and Facilitators to Social Participation in Older Adults: A Systematic Literature Review**
Townsend et al., 2021

- The findings highlight the potential role of internal/ individual factors, as well as broader community factors that interact with common logistical barriers.
- The role of community infrastructure and social network size, in promoting social participation.
- In urban populations, social participation was not impacted by population density but by the proximity and availability of transport for leisure activities.
- Recommended neighbourhood based interventions.

**“We need more things for us”: Being low income and underoccupied in older age**
Shank et al., 2019

- A multimodal cohort study incorporating measures of wellbeing, GPS data, and participant interviews. The findings noted the patterns of being chronically underoccupied for this low income population. Shank went on to recommend place-based challenges, and how they can be mitigated.
- Expressing a desire for things to do was related to concerns about health and safety, access to a vehicle or public transportation.

**“I just love it”: Avid knitters describe health and wellbeing through occupation**
Brooks et al., 2019

- Described this recreational activity as a vehicle for establishing a connection within the community. Being a knitter opened up opportunities for connecting with like minded people, and opened people up to additional social opportunities outside of knitting.
- Social connectedness was also linked to **learning exchange**, which helped participants’ skill development.
- Leisure and social activities provide a sense of occupational identity to many. Many mentioned how this hobby strengthened their belief of being a productive member of society.
Code List

1. Loss of key spaces
2. Queer spaces
3. Dining out
4. Informal socializing – Navigating race/ background/ ethnicity
5. Informal socializing – Navigating gender and gendered norms
6. Informal socializing – Negotiating class
7. Informal socializing – Negotiating ageism/ ableism
8. Other informal socializing
9. Alcohol related occupations
10. Exercise and physical activity programs
11. Other programs offered
12. Other leisure and places for leisure
13. Amenities and resources for social and leisure occupations
14. Stereotypical ‘seniors’ activities and places – whether participants embrace or reject them
15. De-prioritizing of needs of older adults by institutions
16. Advocacy for social and leisure opportunities and places for older adults
17. Creating opportunities and places
18. Transportation & mobility
19. Partnered and family status
20. Cost Impact
21. Outsiders accessing or avoiding neighbourhood leisure or social opportunities
22. Historical connection to a local place
23. Safety
24. Other barriers/ facilitators to social interaction
25. Online Spaces
Coding Report & Analysis

Loss of Key Space
- Changes made to Argyle Mall
- Loss of casino by Queen’s Park
- Loss of Lorne Avenue Public School

Social Dynamics
- Due to the low cost of property in East London, the area is experiencing an influx of new residents who are unfamiliar to the local residents, who have lived in OEV/Argyle since it was a small town. These groups include students, young professionals, and immigrants.

Neighbourhood Changes over Time
- Gentrification of the commercial corridor; most stores and dining options cater to the greater London population rather than East London residents.

Main Findings

Mobility, Accessibility
- Particularly in Argyle – troubles accessing bus routes to popular leisure activities.
- Older adults needing to leave East London for better social and leisure activities.
Neighbourhood Stigma– ‘Anything East of Adelaide’

- Class differences and social stigma against East End can cause challenges for residents when socializing outside of the neighbourhood.

Cost of Activities

- Many participants are low to middle income and cannot afford to engage in all of their interests, often having to prioritize one over the other.
- This emphasizes the need for resources like libraries, in close proximity to neighbourhoods.

Ageism

- Three types of participants generally: (1) those who embrace old age; (2) those who wholly reject being a senior; (3) those who speak about the needs of older adults but don’t consider themselves part of that group.
- Internalized ageism causing social isolation from senior programming.
- Also suggests the need for more diverse programs.

De-prioritization

- Older adults in East London feel particularly neglected by the local government and city planning.
- East London is described as neglected, forgotten, not advocated for.

Main Findings
Recommendations

• East London residents are a viable target market for commercial developments – participants express a need to revitalize the neighbourhood through creating opportunities that interest local residents.

• Incorporating ‘third places’ in East London’s urban design to facilitate the creation of social networks

• Community-level interventions

• Stronger involvement and advocacy from the municipal government for improving public transport in East London, and making it more accessible for residents experiencing mobility issues and frailty.
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References


