

The role of Men's Sheds in promoting the physical and mental well-being of older men.

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PURPOSE

The active and healthy ageing agenda challenges the perception that old age is a negative experience and recognises the positive contributions that older adults can make to their communities¹. However, successful ageing in place requires community-based support for older adults that facilitates social participation, independence and being active². Older men are less likely to join community groups where they can develop social ties and less gender-specific support services are available for them³. Men's Sheds (MiS) is an initiative that aims to mitigate this by fostering the building of social networks between older men by providing social space for them to meet and undertake physical activities such as woodwork or metalwork⁴. The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of MiS on the physical health and mental well-being of the attendees.

METHODS

Two self-reported questionnaires, the RAND 36 - item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), were utilised to investigate the impact of MiS on the physical health and mental well-being of the attendees of 4 Sheds based in the North-West region of England. The questionnaires were given at baseline and the 6 months later.



ETHICS

Manchester Metropolitan Academic Ethics Committee (Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care). Application No: 1467

RESULTS

Descriptive and statistical analysis (paired sample T-tests) were undertaken to investigate if there was a difference in the Men's overall health status after attending the Shed for 6 months. The total mean score at baseline for the SF-36 (n=86) was 69.46 and 67.97 at 6 months showing a slight decline. However, no significant difference was found. Thus, suggesting that maintenance of these components of quality of life had occurred over this period. In sub-analysis, maintenance was achieved in 6 of the 8 categories (limitations due to physical health, energy/fatigue, emotional well-being, social functioning, physical functioning and pain). Two categories (general health and role limitations due to emotional problems) did show a small but significant reduction in scores at 6-month follow up (p=0.026; p=0.02 respectively), indicating some deterioration in quality of life related to these components. For the WEMWBS (n=57) the total mean score at baseline was 53.86 and 51.12 at 6 months. This difference was found to be significant (p = 0.025), indicating that mental well-being had deteriorated at 6 months.

CONCLUSION

Maintenance was achieved in the overall health status of the participants who attended the MiS however; there was a small but significant deterioration in mental well-being at 6 months. Further consideration, therefore, needs to be made as to how the mental well-being of the men who attend the Sheds can be enhanced. This may include ongoing support or additional mechanisms to be put in place to support the men's mental well-being.

IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

As many of the participants who were attending the MiS had physical health problems including multimorbidity, MiS initiatives could help to support the maintenance of these conditions. MiS enterprises could also provide an opportunity for physiotherapists to access older men to promote their health and well-being and thus support the Active and Healthy Ageing agenda.

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