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Ageing Perspectives

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Despite the proliferation of successful ageing (SA) research, the literature is dominated by researcher-driven Anglophone conceptualisations. To date, lay perspectives of SA have not been examined in Europe or Turkey. The current study aims to conduct a mixed-methods examination of conceptualisations of SA in seven underrepresented countries. Using snowball sampling via social media sites, an online survey consisting of established closed-ended and open-ended items – translated into seven languages – was administered. Grounded theory methods and descriptive statistics were used to analyse qualitative and quantitative data, respectively.

Editor's Note

This work in progress report (WiP) was developed by the 2013–2014 cohort of the Junior Researcher Programme (JRP), a service supported by the European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA). During the course of the JRP calendar, the six research groups that are initiated via the European Summer School submit the WiPs of their research to the Journal of European Psychology Students (JEPS). The WiPs are short methodology papers that outline steps undertaken by research groups in developing and carrying out a research project in the context of low-resource, independent, student-driven, cross-cultural research. The WiPs are submitted prior to project completion to enable the authors to improve their research according to the comments resulting from the peer-review process. WiPs also support the dissemination of methods used by student-driven, independent research projects, with the hope of informing others carrying out such work.

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Introduction

As the current demographic shift towards the elderly progresses, unprecedented numbers of individuals are facing the challenges of later life, necessitating a shift in focus from the pursuit of increased length of life to increased quality of life. Investigation into well-being in later life has gained momentum in recent years. However, no consensus exists as to what is exactly meant by "successful ageing" (Cosco, Prina, Perales, Stephan, & Brayne, 2013b; Cosco, Stephan, & Brayne, 2013).

Since the inception of the term, successful ageing theories have evolved and successful ageing theorists have disagreed. Robert Havighurst coined the term in response to the dominant theories of ageing, particularly disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961), in the early 1960's. Havighurst's model (1961) suggests that successful ageing relates to maintenance of activities held during middle ages and adaptation to changing roles brought by old age in order to preserve positive perception of oneself. A new model of well-being as life span growth was proposed by Ryff (1989), using six domains to define successful ageing: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. As examples of psychosocial models, these two models focus mainly on active social

engagement, life satisfaction, adaptation, resilience, and maintenance of daily functioning (Montross et al., 2006). The seminal model of successful ageing by Rowe and Kahn (1987), focuses on absence or avoidance of disease or risk factors, preservation of physical and cognitive functioning, and social involvement with life. A recent systematic review of operational definitions revealed a profound heterogeneity in the conceptualization of successful ageing, with over 100 unique definitions (Cosco et al., 2013b).

Complementing researcher-driven definitions of successful ageing are perspectives from laypersons. Lay perspectives of successful ageing are especially important as there is evidence of great discrepancies between lay perspectives and researcher perspectives of successful ageing (Cosco et al., 2013, 2014). Further, a comparison of successful ageing models, including biomedical, psychosocial, and lay models, revealed that a multidimensional lay model best predicted quality of life as an indicator of successful ageing (Bowling & Iliffe, 2006). Lay models incorporate diverse aspects of successful ageing, such as having a sense of purpose, life satisfaction, sense of humour, physical outlook, and maintenance of learning new things, often excluded from biomedical models (Cosco, Prina, Perales, Stephan, & Brayne, 2013a; Stephan & Brayne, 2013).

The literature on successful ageing definitions is dominated by research on middle-aged and old people in Western cultures. Most of the published studies on definitions of successful ageing originate from Western cultures, mainly from North America, with few studies from Eastern cultures (Torres, 1999). Research comparing definitions of successful ageing in Western and non-Western cultures has demonstrated that physical and mental health, and social functioning are cross-culturally important. Asians particularly perceive family and financial security to be essential for successful ageing (Hugh, Kempen, & De Vries, 2010). This underlines the importance of further research that integrates perspectives on successful ageing from different cultures.

Previous research on conceptualisations of successful ageing has primarily focused on middle and older ages. Thus, it remains unclear if perceptions of successful ageing change over the lifespan (Chou & Chi, 2002; Phelan, Anderson, LaCroix, & Larson, 2004; Rowe & Kahn, 1998), highlighting the need for research also involving younger age groups.

The current study addresses these shortcomings in the field by focusing on young adults' perspectives of successful ageing in a previously unstudied sample of Turks and continental Europeans from Estonia, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, and Switzerland. These countries were chosen as they represent a mixture of cultures ranging from Western European, Baltic to Eastern European, and Eurasian – countries, which are known to show significant differences in terms of their cultural values and norms. For example, while living with one's parents or as a couple with children and gender asymmetry in family care responsibilities are much more frequent in Turkey, in the rest of the countries, living alone and gender egalitarian care responsibilities are the commonly seen household dynamics (Kotowaska, Matysiak, Styrc, Pailhé, Solaz, & Vignoli, 2010). Furthermore, one's family is the main component of sociability in all of the countries, especially in Estonia and Romania. However, Turkey is the country with the most frequent interaction with and receive social support from siblings, neighbours, and friends, whereas in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands less family support is seen as appropriate (Kotowaska et al., 2010). In terms of work arrangements, while job security is provided within European countries, especially in Estonia and Romania through permanent employment contracts, Turkey can be characterized by strong concerns about job loss and increased working hours (Kotowaska et al., 2010). Lastly, while the retirement age is set between 63–67 years of age in all of the countries studied, the extent of state-provisioned pension schemes varies greatly between them (Eichhorst et al., 2011).

The objective of the current study is to conduct mixed-methods research to explore young adults' perception of the definition of successful ageing across seven different European countries. Young lay people's views are examined and compared between countries in order to provide a more comprehensive conceptualisation of successful ageing that will be relevant for European and Turkish lay people themselves.

Methods
Inclusion Criteria
Study participants were nationals of Belgium, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Switzerland or Turkey between 18–35 years old. This target population was chosen, as there are no extant studies investigating young people's conceptualisations of "successful ageing". However, as their ideas of what it means to age well most likely influence choices they make in their daily lives (e.g., in areas such as health or finances), a better understanding of young people's views on successful ageing is important.

Sampling
An online cross-cultural mixed-methods survey was administered from October 2013 to April 2014. The survey was anonymous, internet-based, and self-administered via the electronic platform Unipark (www.unipark.de) with sampling perpetuated through online snowball sampling via social media sites, notably Facebook.

Survey Design
The survey consisted of both open and closed questions regarding individuals' conceptualizations of successful ageing. Participants were asked, "How would you define 'successful ageing'?", as per (Reichstadt, Depp, Palinkas, Folsom, & Jeste, 2007; Reichstadt, Sengupta, Depp, Palinkas, & Jeste, 2010). Additionally, established surveys exploring different aspects of successful ageing were administered (Charbonneau-Lyons, Mosher-Ashley, & Stanford-Pollock (2002); Phelan et al., 2004). A total of 49 items captured diverse aspects of successful ageing ranging from relationships, financial concerns, independence, intrinsic values,

cognitive functioning, physical appearance, to accomplishments. All items were rated for their subjective importance on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at all important* to *Very important*. Additionally, demographic data pertaining to participants' age, socio-economic status (Ganzeboom, 2010) and nationality were collected.

Translation

Questionnaire items were translated by means of a parallel or committee translation approach and back-translation (Harkness & Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). The original items in American English were independently translated to the target languages by two researchers who were native speakers of the respective target languages. Translators then reached a consensus translation. The consensus translation was independently back-translated by two further contributors and again, an English consensus translation was reached through discussion. This back-translated questionnaire was compared with the original and checked for discrepancies by a native English speaker (TDC).

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended questions will be analyzed using qualitative grounded theory methods (GTM; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Before coding commences, a methods workshop will be held to ensure uniformity in coding procedures. At each stage of coding, quality control measures, in the form of sample code submissions to the first author (TDC), will be implemented to ensure uniformity in coding procedures and consistency between co-authors.

Independent open coding of participant responses will be conducted by the Data Team (DT) in their and the respondents' respective native languages. This initial coding will be conducted in the language the respective data were collected in to allow themes to emerge while staying close to the data (Tarozzi, 2013). After each response is coded, memos will be written in the language of the respondent/co-author capturing impressions and perspectives on the responses. Further, general memos will be recorded after all responses are open-coded. Upon completion of the initial coding procedures, meetings will be held to discuss identified codes and emergent themes in English to address any translational issues.

From these meetings and correspondences, coders will develop mind-maps, i.e. spatial representations of interconnected codes, – in English – of the codes the DT will identify in their native language. These mind-maps will then be synthesized and refined by TDC into a master list of codes. Skype meetings will be held to discuss and agree upon the master list of codes, discussing any discrepancies/translational issues before the DT will return to the responses for focused coding.

Focused coding will be conducted independently in English, creating categories and sub-categories from participants' original responses using the master list of codes by the DT. Group meetings will be held to discuss emergent themes/categories and to facilitate collective theory integration, being mindful to preserve the nuance of participants' responses, in English. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison will be conducted, i.e. comparing data with data, data with code, code with code, code with categories, categories with data, theory with categories, theory with codes, and theory with data, to ensure good fit and relevance of emergent theories (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

Quantitative Analysis

The main aim of the quantitative analysis will be the investigation of potential differences across the countries surveyed on the two metrics of successful ageing employed in the current study (Charbonneau-Lyons et al., 2002; Phelan et al., 2004). To this end, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) with nationality as independent variable will be conducted. Post-hoc tests adjusting for multiple comparisons will be employed to investigate differences between specific countries. As a first step before any quantitative analysis, however, cross-country differences in regards to socio-economic status and age of the respective country sub-samples will be investigated using ANOVA and Chi-square tests, respectively. Should these preliminary analyses reveal statistically significant cross-country differences in age and/or socio-economic status of the sample, the primary analysis of differences in measures of successful ageing will be adjusted for these through analyses of co-variance (ANCOVA).

Additionally, we will also conduct a comparison of the present study's results with those of a study using the same metric in a population of young people from the United States of America as reported by Charbonneau-Lyons and colleagues (2002) and Phelan and colleagues (2004). This analysis, however, will be restricted to a descriptive comparison as Charbonneau-Lyons et al. (2002) only reported means but no standard deviations for the outcome measures in the relevant age groups of their sample. This makes further in-depth inferential testing for group differences impossible.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the study was sought and granted by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of the University of Cambridge.

Practical Aspects

From the outset, the DT had a monumental task in the preparation of this manuscript. A pre-submission abstract was accepted with a full-manuscript journal-submission deadline just 168 days later. Further, the project had no funding, the DT was spread across eight countries, and this was the first foray into mixed methods research for many DT members. Despite these profound temporal and geographic obstacles, the DT managed to persevere, largely due to a symbiotic union of stubbornness, ambition, and Skype.

The personal attributes of the DT members were integral to the successful completion of the project, working well as individuals and productively within the DT. Every DT member was highly motivated and cognizant of his/her skills, knowing when to ask for help and when to use their particular area of expertise to benefit the group. A

diversity of skillsets was a key asset to the group, as was maintaining open lines of communication. Regular meetings were held via Skype, with a steady stream of emails trickling into DT inboxes. Hard deadlines were set for each piece of the project, e.g., ethics applications, online platform development, etc., and adhered to; a compliment to the resolve of the DT members.

Current Status of Project
Data collection in progress.

Prospective Discussion
There are several limitations in the current study that must be acknowledged, notably with regards the multilingual and online nature of the study. Online studies are prone to issues of representativeness and bias, limiting the scope of the generalizability of these findings. Facebook has positive attributes for social researchers, due to its ability to sample hard-to-reach populations/subpopulations (Bhutta, 2012), but it is prone to selection/non-response bias. Further, using snowball sampling increases the possibility of oversampling individuals with larger networks (Heckathorn, 1997).

The current study highlights the need for further research into lay perspectives of successful ageing in different cultures. Acknowledging that different cultures may have very different conceptualisations of successful ageing is a step towards the realisation of culturally relevant successful ageing conceptualisations.

The field of successful ageing is flourishing, but there is still a lack of research on perspectives of successful ageing in individuals outside of the English-speaking world. This study provides a step in the direction of a more culturally heterogeneous illumination of successful ageing perspectives, which is important for having culturally-adapted conceptualisation of successful ageing.

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