

Older Adults' Perception of Successful Aging among Unrest Situation: A Case of the Three Southernmost Provinces of Thailand

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Abstract : Like many other countries, Thailand is experiencing an increase in its proportion of older adults. However, the political, social, and religious climates of the various regions of Thailand are very diverse and the life experiences of older Thai citizens can vary greatly by region. For more than a decade, the southernmost provinces, namely Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat, have experienced social and political unrest, often characterized by violence in the form of bombings and shootings, which has impacted the older adults residing in these regions. While, Muslims are considered a minority in Thailand, the majority of individuals in southernmost regions are Muslims, causing these regions to be different in terms of culture and beliefs. Using a phenomenological approach, this study examines older adults' perceptions of successful aging within the context of violent social and political unrest. This research aims to 1) understand how older adults living in these areas perceive successful aging in relation to Rowe and Kahn's successful ageing model, and 2) describe the experiences of older adults living in areas of violent social and political unrest. Data were collected using in-depth interviews with eight older adults living in the unrest area, composing of four males and four females aged between 55-75. Content analysis was used to investigate older adults' perception of successful aging. Older adults living their life amidst the violence did not view the situation as a threat to their life for they viewed that they are not the targets of the unrest situation. Additionally, participants identified their religious beliefs and a strong sense of community belonging as coping strategies employed to deal with social and political unrest. Thus, according to them, the violence did not affect their perception of successful aging. While the participants' perceptions of successful aging were generally consistent with aspects identified in the successful aging model proposed by Rowe and Kahn, a theme of "financial stability" emerged. The results can be divided into four interrelated themes, which are; 1) engaging with others; 2) religiosity; 3) financial stability; and 4) health. Understanding the older persons' view of successful aging in vulnerable situations should add more depth and enhance the conceptualization of the successful aging concept.

Keywords : cultural gerontology, minority population, successful aging, unrest situation

Conference Title : ICHAA 2016 : International Conference on Healthy and Active Aging

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : July 25-26, 2016