

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: Lingnan University

Unit of Assessment (UoA): 28 – Social Work and Social Policy

Title of case study: Productive Ageing and Wellbeing Among the Elderly

(1) Summary of the impact

Research by Lingnan's social policy group has a long history of helping tackle the challenges posed by societal aging. The focal point for this work has been the Asia-Pacific Institute of Ageing Studies (APIAS) which has been a pioneer in social gerontological research in Hong Kong. The research has impacted *internationally* through the involvement of key members in policy-making. *Local* impact has been substantially evidenced through close relationships with service providers and NGOs, extensive coverage of APIAS research findings and activities in media. Empirical research has been at the heart of training programmes, public awareness events and policy formulation concerned with elderly wellbeing and active ageing. Overall, the research has impacted the lives of thousands of elderly people in Hong Kong and the wider region.

(2) Underpinning research

The underpinning research for the case study is the work led by Professor Alfred Chan, Director of APIAS from 2002 to 2016, related research by his predecessor, Professor David Phillips (APIAS Director from 1997 to 2002) on age-friendly housing and neighbourhoods and more recent and ongoing work focused on age-friendly cities, intergenerational communication and health promotion, and gerontechnology and smart ageing led by Professor Ka Ho Mok.

The impact case study relates to three particular areas:

1. The role of senior faculty of APIAS in international networks. Notably, Professor David Phillips has been closely connected to UNESCAP, the Western Pacific Regional Office of the WHO, the ESRC Ageing and Urbanisation Network, the Asian Development Fund.
2. Research concerning a major project commissioned by the Macau Government (2013-2015) in which APIAS researched a specific security mechanism in anticipation of its rapidly ageing population. The commissioned project, research publications and training courses formed an integrated, action research cluster focused on 'enhancing the wellbeing of the elderly. Two background reports were commissioned to identify elderly needs and service gaps drawing on both international and local experiences (R1 and *Research Report on International Elderly Care Policy and Theory: Social Security for the Elderly in Macau SAR*). Instituto de Acção Social, Macao SAR Government. APIAS was also responsible for the development of the subsequent 10 year action and the evaluation measures required for public consultation. In developing the Action Plan there was a 45 day public consultation period on the proposals in which Professor Chan attended all seven public consultation meetings. This research also links to Professor Chan's and Professor Phillips' work on active ageing and age friendly neighbourhoods in Hong Kong (R2, R3, R4).
3. More recent research led by Professor Mok employs novel methods to engage both elderly and younger people as well as key stakeholders from NGOs and local governments in the development of activities to promote the eight domains of an age-friendly city (R5). These cover various aspects of the physical environment, social and economic environment, and social and health services. The research on active ageing undertaken by APIAS and research

teams from three other collaborating universities involved baseline studies and focus groups covering 18 districts in Hong Kong, 740 individual respondents and 91 participants in focus groups. This major programme of action research is supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club through two substantial grants on *Age Friendly City Baseline Assessments and Training and Professional Support* (Pilot Phase 2015-2019; 2017-2020 Total: HK\$11.6 million) and a further related grant on *Intergenerational Communication and Health Promotion* (2017-2020, HK\$8.8 million). The research on age friendly cities will be extended beyond 2019 with a further grant of HK\$2.4 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club and the societal impact of the Lingnan work on ageing has been recognised with new Jockey Club funding of HK\$19.6 million for community-oriented, action research on *Gerontechnology and Smart Ageing*.

(3) References to the research

- R1. Chan, A.C. M. 陳章明 (2015). *澳門養老狀況及政策研究報告 (Research Report on Elderly Care and Policy in Macau)*. Instituto de Acção Social, Macao SAR Government.
- R2. Chan, A. C. M., & Cao, T. (2015). Age-friendly neighbourhoods as civic participation: implementation of an active ageing policy in Hong Kong. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 29(1), 53-68.
- R3. Chan, A. C. M, & Ma, C. H. K. (2015). Ageing trends in Asia-Pacific region. In J. Twigg & W. Martin (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of cultural gerontology* (pp. 428-437). Oxon: Routledge.
- R4. Phillips, D.R., Woo, J., Cheung, F., Wong, F.M. and Chau P.H. 'Exploring the age-friendliness of Hong Kong: opportunities, initiatives and challenges in an ageing Asian city', in Tine Buffel, Sophie Handler and Chris Phillipson (eds.) *Age-friendly Cities and Communities: A Global Perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2018, pp. 119-142.
- R5. Padmore Adusei Amoah, Ka Ho Mok, Zhuoyi Wen & Lai Wah Li (2019) Achieving the age-friendly city agenda: an interventional study in Hong Kong's Islands District, *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, DOI: [10.1080/17516234.2019.1663981](https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2019.1663981)

(4) Details of the impact

The impact of increased longevity on society represents one of the most important challenges for the social and policy agendas of governments. Impact directly related to the research presented above exists in three forms: direct impact on policy-making, direct impact on communities through training and creation of programmes, and dissemination of information to a large number of key international players in the field.

Impact on Policy-making

Direct policy input on this matter was sought by the Macau SAR government on old-age security through research commissioned by its Social Welfare Bureau (2013-2015). The SAR project focused on developing an aging index and was informed by two specially prepared research reports (R1 and *Research Report on International Elderly Care Policy and Theory: Social Security for the Elderly in Macau SAR*). The research was developed into a policy framework with a ten year action plan (2016-2025) to serve as guidance to all parties and individuals in Macau¹. This represents a key point of impact as it shaped ageing policies in Macau which is the home to 60-70,000 individuals in or approaching retirement. Evidence to corroborate the direct link between the research-led Action Plan and the impact it had on the elderly community of Macau is acknowledged in a letter from the Macau Social Welfare Bureau.²

Professor Chan was also, Chair of the Elderly Commission from 2011-2016, the main policy advisory body to the HKSAR on aging issues. In this capacity he was a major contributor to debates around the shaping of policy for the elderly and issues of retirement in Hong Kong. For example, research Professor Chan undertook for the Bauhinia Research Foundation, an influential think tank, sparked a wider spread debate about optional retirement schemes.³

Impact on Community Development

The APIAS tradition of action research, in which the university and the community work closely to achieve meaningful improvements in social wellbeing is encapsulated in the two major projects on creating an *Age-Friendly City* and *Intergenerational Communications*.

The entire Age Friendly City study covered 18 districts in Hong Kong and involved some 740 respondents in 91 focus groups and more than 9,700 questionnaires. The Lingnan APIAS team conducted baseline assessment studies, and organised training and district engagement activities in Tsuen Wan, Islands District, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long. This three-year programme allowed for the creation of activities aimed at developing action plans for local districts, providing professional training for local residents and NGO staff and organising a public forum to promote age friendliness. The programme involved the training of almost 700 elderly ambassadors. The APIAS team also produced an ambassador training manual and puzzle card games for local welfare agencies and schools to train ambassadors and promote Age-friendly city concepts in the longer term. This aim is to ensure that the impact can be sustainable and long-lasting in local communities even after the close of the project.

In terms of the overall local impact and reach of the project, there were almost 3000 individuals and 300 households who were the direct beneficiaries, and over 4800 indirect beneficiaries. Furthermore, the project involved 55 NGOs and 12 local government agencies (4 social welfare departments, 4 home affairs departments, 4 district councils). A public forum held specifically to evaluate and discuss the results of this project in June 2018 had 400 participants. The questionnaire feedback confirmed the impact of the various activities, with two thirds of participants stating that their knowledge had been significantly enhanced with regard to how to achieve more age friendly urban environments and greater social participation among the elderly. Mr Cheung Leong, Executive Director, Charities and Community of The Hong Kong Jockey Club commended the forum for being an excellent exchange platform on many social issues which could be solved through cross-sector and cross- profession discussion and collaboration. In addition, four districts obtained WHO certified status as ‘age friendly’.

Empowering the Elderly through Training

The related action research project on Intergenerational Communication is focused on the advocacy of healthy ageing and the enhancement of intergenerational solidarity. In this programme, both younger and old generation ambassadors have been involved in community based service and health promotion activities through a variety of cross-sector partnerships in the Tuen Mun and Yuen Long district. Over 200 young and old ambassadors have been trained to equip them with the skills to conduct community service and 24 NGOs have actively participated. In order to promote healthy lifestyles in local communities through doing regular stretching and muscle strengthening exercises, the project team has produced an elderly physical fitness exercise manual (in Chinese) and fitness exercise video (in Cantonese)⁴. The relevant information was also disseminated via whatsapp groups among the ambassadors and participants of the community service. In the period 2017-2019 there were over 6000 elderly attendees at exercise and education sessions organised by the programme.

International and Local Recognition

The value and impact of Lingnan`s contribution to policy development and the wellbeing of the elderly in the local community is evidenced by the various letters of appreciation received by the research team. For example, one from Tuen Mun Neighbourhood Advice Action Council⁵ stated

that the programme had helped to “improve people’s social health” (有助提升長者的社交健康) and had been “very practical in maintaining physical and mental health” (十分實用, 有助維持身心健康). Another, from Yan Chai Hospital⁶ said that participants felt that the activities and training “could extend their social network, make a pleasant life and keep them physically and mentally healthy” (參賽者表示活動亦能擴闊他們的社交圈子, 令他們生活更愉快, 身心靈均得到健康). Similarly, a letter from Pok Oi Hospital⁷ says that both the physical and mental health of participants had been improved and that the training activities were all useful, practical and meaningful. Comments from focus group participants and from the Minutes of the Tsuen Wan District Council add further confirmation of the value of Lingnan’s contribution⁸. And a letter from the Chair of Tsuen Wan District Council provides broader appreciation for Lingnan’s support in building a more age friendly city and for its early membership of the WHO global network of age-friendly communities⁹. The continuation of this programme of action research on the wellbeing of the elderly through the new Gerontology and Smart Ageing project is already having a wide impact through Socialpreneur courses (July 2019), Gerontech courses (August 2019) and with the Gerontech Lab (opening November 2019). The societal reach of Lingnan’s social policy group work on active ageing will be substantially extended through collaboration with the public broadcaster RTHK with the production of a 26 episode programme to promote the use of gerontechnology in everyday life¹⁰.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

¹. Official website of The Information of Services for Senior Citizens of Macao SAR where Old Age Security Action Plan can be found with references to the Lingnan research.

². Letter from Macau Government acknowledging direct role of APIAS research directed by Professor Chan in the development of their policy for the elderly.

³. South China Morning Post reports on Professor Chan’s research. ‘Flexibility floated to keep aging workforce young’.

⁴. Exercise fitness manual for elderly people. Fitness exercise video.

⁵. Letter from Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council, Tuen Mun thanking Lingnan University (APIAS) for organising ageing related activities and for promoting intergenerational communication on aging health issues

⁶. Letter from Yan Chai Hospital thanking Lingnan University (APIAS) for organising ageing related activities and for promoting intergenerational communication on aging health issues

⁷. Letter from Pok Oi Hospital acknowledging Lingnan’s work in improving health and well-being of the elderly participants.

⁸. Extracts from focus group interviews and Tsuen Wan District Council Minutes

⁹. Thank you letter from Chair of Tsuen Wan District Council.

¹⁰. RTHK Radio Programme on Gerontechnology