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Diet adjustment in later life: A grounded theory study of eating behaviours amongst the ageing population of Limerick

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The ageing of the population going forward will embody one of the most momentous demographic and social developments encountered by Irish society. Falling fertility rates and ever-increasing life expectancy will see the number of older people aged 60 or more almost double, with those over the age of 75 expected to almost triple by the year 2050. Older individuals are the fastest growing segment of the world's population, yet they are often overlooked by the food industry, with most food products targeted at those aged 21 to 49. Disruptions in diet and eating behaviors are common among older adults however, little is known about the processes underlying these disruptions. The central goal for assisting individuals to age well is promoting a healthy and nutritious diet however, "Eating behavior is the result of a complex interaction of physical, psychosocial, cultural and environmental factors that impact food choices and dietary practices", and addressing the barriers of access to food is extremely important to ensure adequate food consumption in older adults, (Brownie and Coutts, 2014, p. 182). Conversely, the extent to which food shopping can constitute a manageable part of older people's daily/weekly routines is strongly influenced by their economic means and health status. The aim of this study was to identify potentials barriers and motivators for food intake in the ageing population. Qualitative methods based on a constructivist grounded theory approach, guided by a critical realist worldview were used. A mixture of intensive interviews and unstructured non-participant observations were chosen to reach the research objectives, as they fit grounded theory methodology. The sample criteria included those over the age of 65, living independent lives, and who were responsible for most of their shopping/cooking needs. A substantive theory of why and how older adults eating behaviors change in later life was developed.

Biography

Sharon O Flaherty is currently completing her MA in research at Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) in Ireland. Sharon recently graduated with a BA honours degree in Applied Social Science in Social Care Work at LIT. She received the Social Care Ireland award for academic excellence across her course. Sharon has won two awards for research presentations on her undergraduate thesis titled 'Exploring food insecurity among single parent families in Ireland'. She is currently working as a Tutor at Limerick Institute of Technology. She is from Co Clare, where she currently resides with her husband and two children.

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