

OUR VOICES

The experiences of people ageing without children

How will, and should, older adults without children approach their later years? While many issues affecting older people have received attention, two questions that remain under-researched and under-reported are, why more people over 50 are entering later life without children and how this will affect them. One in five people over 50 are not parents, while others enter later life without children because of death, estrangement or distance. By 2030 an estimated 2 million people over the age of 65 will be without adult children. An unspoken assumption underlying policy and planning on ageing is that older people have children and grandchildren who can provide the required help, support and care. Those without children are not considered.

Our Voices, a research report, based on focus groups, interviews and case studies, highlights the concerns voiced directly by people ageing without children. Six main themes emerge from the experiences that participants describe in their own words: feeling invisible; being judged unfavourably for not having children; having no one 'to tell your story' when you are no longer able to tell it yourself; the 'trigger-point' significance of becoming a carer oneself; the issues of practical support; and losing touch with other generations. The report examines each of these themes and the many factors contributing to them, which include false assumptions, ageism, language, political narratives focused on 'hardworking families', and the fact that many people ageing without children belong to groups experiencing other forms of discrimination, including racial discrimination, and discrimination against LGBT people. Besides the comments participants voice on particular points, several personal experiences of ageing without children are narrated at greater length in the report.

There are no easy answers to these questions, but the report identifies a number of solutions that people ageing without children propose themselves. These include measures to help central and local government planning take account of present realities and future needs, to ensure that medical and social care services are sufficiently informed and equipped to provide the required support, and that advocacy services are available for people ageing without children. Steps are also recommended to help people to plan adequately for their later life, to broaden public understanding of the issues, and to invest in intergenerational programmes. Finally, the report identifies a number of areas where further research is needed.

Our Voices: The experiences of people ageing without children is published jointly by the **Beth Johnson Foundation** and **Ageing Without Children**. Printed copies of the report are available from **The Beth Johnson Foundation, Parkfield House, 64 Princes Road, Hartshill, Stoke on Trent, ST4 7JL** or by emailing admin@bjf.org.uk

The report can also be downloaded in PDF form from www.bjf.org.uk or www.awoc.org



'They won't let me go home from hospital unless there's a named person to pick me up... I tell them I don't have a name to give and they look surprised as if it never happens. Perhaps it is just me who doesn't have anyone.'

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