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21ST CENTURY



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Pluralages is published by the Centre de recherche et d'expertise en gérontologie sociale (CREGÉS) of the CSSS Cavendish – Centre affilié universitaire (CAU). This magazine is designed to inform the public and raise awareness of social issues surrounding aging by, among other things, presenting the research initiatives and expertise being developed by members of the CREGÉS. *Pluralages* also aims to promote and foster ties between the research, education, practice and citizen action - for and by seniors - communities. Issues related to aging are presented through the lens of social gerontology, touching on such themes as diversity in aging, social and citizen recognition of the elderly, experiences with social exclusions and solidarities, political concerns, State directives and public policy targeting the aging population and its needs.

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The many faces of CREGÉS

The VIES team: Tackling aging, social exclusions and solidarity

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A presentation by the VIES research team¹

Since 2005, the Centre de recherche et d'expertise en gérontologie sociale (CREGÉS) at CSSS Cavendish, a designated university-affiliated centre, has been home to a large joint research team known as VIES, which is funded by the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture. There are several such teams across Québec working to further knowledge in various research areas using multidisciplinary approaches and practices that favour partnerships with the community. We believe their contributions are essential in that they allow research to be anchored in the real-world experiences of the population, and particularly, for the VIES Team, the experiences of the elderly, their family members and friends and those who work with them day after day².

The VIES team is made up of 42 researchers, researcher-practitioners, students and other stakeholders whose interests lie in the various forms of social exclusion and solidarity experienced by the elderly. Their work constitutes the fifth axis of research at CREGÉS, and cuts across the other four. As such, much like CREGÉS, the VIES team focuses on 1) *the multiple ways of aging and how*

they are socially represented, 2) older peoples' social and living environments 3) practises for and with older people, and 4) public policy on aging and the social involvement of the elderly, by analyzing them through a lens that draws attention to cases of inequity and social exclusion, but also to solidarity.

The various expressions of exclusion

Analyzing the experiences of elderly people through the lens of exclusion enables us to question social structures. Similarly, taking this approach inevitably leads to the identification and anticipation of potential solutions to lessen our

The seven dimensions of social exclusion

Symbolic exclusion	Corresponds to negative representations and images of elderly people (e.g. vulnerable, dependent, incompetent), as well as the diminishing of their place and roles in society. This dimension of exclusion contributes also to their invisibility.
Identity-based exclusion	Refers to an identity reduced to a single membership group, which implies that the person is perceived solely or almost solely through the minute prism of age, thereby excluding the multiple determinants of his or her identity: gender, origin, culture, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc.
Socio-political exclusion	Takes the form of restricted access to participation in society and the spheres of influence, decision-making and politics. The elderly may experience a lack of collective or individual power and political weight.
Institutional exclusion	Implies the total or partial denial of access, for the elderly, to social and health protection measures and policies implemented by social and political institutions. This dimension of exclusion is equally associated with the standardization of practices that disregard the diversity of needs and experiences among elderly people and their loved ones.
Economic exclusion	Characterized by the absence of access to the income, material resources and capital required to meet one's basic needs.
Territorial exclusion	Refers to reduced geographic freedom, confinement to isolated spaces such as the home, and loss of control over one's living environment. This dimension of exclusion may be attributed to the physical limitations of certain elderly people, but also, for example, to poorly adapted or inaccessible public spaces or public transportation.
Exclusion from significant social ties	Defined as the absence or loss of social networks, or rejection from or abuse by such networks.



society's deficiencies in accounting for all of its members and their diversity³.

On the basis of its research, the VIES team defines social exclusion as: *"a process of non-acknowledgment and deprivation of rights and resources of certain segments of the population [in this case, the elderly] that takes the shape of power dynamics between groups with divergent visions and interests. Such processes result in inequities and, eventually, to isolation from society in seven dimensions [...]"*⁴. (Refer to table on facing page).

In adopting a multifaceted view of exclusion, the VIES team naturally speaks of exclusion in the plural, highlighting the collective nature of these exclusions as well as the social, political and economic factors that support them. The team also portrays elderly people as active participants in social spheres and not as *passive, dependent people*.

Diversity in experience and in aging

We must stress that the VIES team does not view the elderly as one large excluded, homogeneous group. On the contrary, it has witnessed great diversity in their experiences and their resistance to situations of exclusion⁵. Certain cases of exclusion are nonetheless inextricably linked in some way with "age exclusion" due to the value placed on youth and qualities typically associated with youthfulness: beauty, performance, speed, efficiency, creativity, etc. On the other end of the spectrum, negative and stereotypical images of elderly people and aging abound. For example, the aging population is presented as a burden on society and a threat to or a weight on government money.

Occurrences of inclusion and exclusion are complex⁶. Any person may be excluded at some point in his or her life for reasons having nothing to do with age, such as poverty, sexism, racism or sexual orientation. However, these processes may become more prevalent as a person gets older. Take, for example, a wealthy gay man who has been living relatively



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openly with his partner for several years. The new experiences tied to his aging, such as residing in a healthcare facility, may give rise to new sources of discrimination or exclusion. Being a woman also usually implies a certain degree of social inequality. As a woman gets older, the chances that she will end up living in poverty increase, which thus accentuates the differences in living conditions between elderly men and women⁷.

The VIES team's work contributes to the observation and analysis of the complex nature of the situations experienced by people, in which a range of cases of inclusion/exclusion, advantage/disadvantage and power/weakness intersect. They also draw attention to the wide

array of living experiences and social standings among the elderly.

Solidarity as a response to exclusion

Out of the concept of exclusions inherently arises that of inclusion, which constitutes an objective rather than a course of action, and solidarity would appear to be a good means to achieving that end. According to the VIES team, solidarity is *"a driver of social change in line with a political logic rather than a supportive logic. Manifestations of solidarity are founded on a collective willingness to take action to resolve the day-to-day problems faced*

continued on page 6 »

by individuals through an acknowledgment of the other and his or her differences, needs and abilities.”⁸ In this way, this view of solidarities is as collective in nature as that of exclusions. Each individual is a social player who influences the production of situations of exclusion and the building of solidarities.

« The members of the VIES team firmly believe that redefining a public arena that is more inclusive must be done with, not for, the excluded. »

The work of the VIES team: A few concrete examples

Several studies have shown that certain problems associated with adulthood appear to become “invisible” as a person ages. This invisibility—which one can perceive, for example, in social interactions (or lack thereof) in public spaces⁹—means that when elderly people facing this problem begin needing social or healthcare services, they end up either neglected or confined to “ghettos” of poorly adapted services. Domestic violence is often overlooked by those working with elderly women¹⁰. Elderly people with mental illnesses can end up living at home without assistance if they have been deinstitutionalized, or in old age residences with inadequate services when they begin to show signs of severe incompetence¹¹. Such situations create a great deal of insecurity and tension for the other residents¹². Elderly immigrants have a lot of trouble obtaining the information they need to access long-term care and services. Without adequate support, these people and their families go through a multitude of exclusions¹³. These findings underscore the importance of pursuing our investigation into elderly communities experiencing particular cases of institutional and identity-based exclusions, hence our interest, for example, in aging people who use end of life palliative home care services¹⁴.

Lastly, it should be noted that the VIES team’s research also examines acts of solidarity by elderly people through volunteering¹⁵ and social and political involvement¹⁶. They provide a brief overview of a rich and diverse body of research. Numerous other projects are underway that are looking at issues associated with aging that are as critical as those listed herein.

The role of the elderly in the VIES team and in research

The members of the VIES team firmly believe that redefining a public arena that is more inclusive must be done with, not for, the excluded¹⁷. Not only do these researchers have the power to transform the social and political spheres, but they have a responsibility to do so, and to re-examine the conditions for conducting research¹⁸. Research generates knowledge, an instrument of power. It is important that this knowledge be created collectively in order to enhance the distribution of power. The elderly community’s involvement in research is therefore a fundamental objective.

Partnership is the cornerstone of this team, and that on which it was founded. Not only does its research aim to answer the questions put forth by various partners¹⁹, but it requires their active participation, by means of various forums and committees, to define, conceptualize and execute projects and to convey the findings. As such, we are currently working to establish an elderly partnership forum. This, along with the VIES team’s numerous other projects, will no doubt be the subject of articles appearing in upcoming editions of *Pluralages*! <

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20. Partners of the VIES team include: CSSS Cavenish-CAU, the Table de concertation des aînés de l’île de Montréal, the Alliance des Communautés Culturelles pour l’Égalité dans la Santé et les Services Sociaux (ACCESSS), the provincial association of homecare workers, the Conseil des aînés de Notre-Dame-de-Grace, Mémés déchaînées. Others such as the Association des retraités de l’enseignement (AREQ) and the Conseil des aînés, are collaborating on special projects.