

Managing life changes roundtable - Summary

Topic: Managing major life changes

Background

This note summarises discussions from Ageing Better's Managing Life Changes Roundtable of 8th February 2016. Twenty-three people participated in the roundtable discussion, coming from a range of backgrounds – academic, public, private and charity sectors.

Many changes occur in later life – retirement, moving home, becoming a grandparent or carer, bereavement, poor health or entering care. These changes can have a significant effect on the quality of our life. At Ageing Better, we want more people to be able to successfully manage major changes in later life.

Some people call this ability to manage change 'resilience'. The key objectives of this roundtable was to better understand how to measure resilience in later life. This will help to a) inform development of a composite measure of resilience to identify, longitudinally, key predictors of an individual's ability to face life changes successfully and b) the possible development of an evaluation framework and co-design of a new resilience measure, led by experts in the field.

Three topics were proposed for discussion based on earlier scoping work by Ageing Better. These were:

Topic 1: Developing our understanding of the current measurement / assessment of resilience:

- How can we develop consistent evaluation measures and methods?
- What factors are important in the measurement of resilience?
- How do you currently measure / assess resilience?

Topic 2: Is there other evidence we should be considering?

Topic 3: Explore feasibility of co-designing a new resilience measure

Summary

Six main themes emerged from the discussion.

These are set out below along with key discussion points made.

1. TRANSITIONS TO BE SEEN AS A PROCESS

- Transitions need to be considered as a process rather than an individual event – *the resilience trajectory*. It is not necessarily the first transition that impacts someone, it is the accumulation of multiple transitions across the lifecourse that sends someone on a downward trajectory.
- We need to understand the pattern of events around the time of a transition and how they impact on someone's ability to cope.

2. PREDICTING AN INDIVIDUAL'S ABILITY TO MANAGE LIFE CHANGES

- Prior to interventions we need to identify factors that predispose people to cope with life changes better. What are the protective factors? What are the factors missing that lead to poorer outcomes? And vice versa – what factors can lead to positive outcomes?
- Looking at some of those trajectories after somebody has had a period of challenge and seeing what factors influence one way or another.

3. A BETTER SET OF MEASURES AND DEFINITIONS

- It was clear that there is a need to facilitate the development of a new measure for resilience. While current measures are available they are each flawed in some respect – most only focus on the individual, have poor psychometric properties and are

often not developed with older adults.

- Developing a new measure should include aspects of sense of control, loneliness, depression, subjective health, subjective wellbeing, hopelessness and optimism, which are all key indicators of resilience.
 - One single measure is unlikely to be sufficient:
 - We need measures to be both transition specific and cohort specific - what works for one group isn't going to work for another group.
 - A basket of measures would be more useful than a single measure, this would allow a person to feed into what they think works best for them.
 - We need to understand the tools that are out there and then pull them together into a toolkit and create extra tools where the gaps are.
 - However, before we can accurately measure resilience, we need to improve understanding of the definition of what the term "resilience" means and what it is we are looking to measure – should we instead be focusing on learning how to support people to manage changes rather than how to measure it?
- ### 4. UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL RESOURCES
- It was identified that we need to understand individual and community resilience – looking at the family as a whole. There is no point focusing interventions on an individual when they sit within a family unit. How can we step beyond this and look at the entire network around people?

- To fully understand the social aspects of resilience we must look at the community and family context that they live in. We need to unpick the importance of significant relationships on an individual's ability to manage life changes - community and social resources can be key to someone's resilience and we should therefore embed an individual within these resources.
- We must also look to understand the different emotional, intrinsic and psychological resources that can drive an individual's ability to make it through transitions successfully, as well as their social resources.
- For younger people, interventions are successfully delivered in schools because you have a captive cohort, however there is nothing similar for people in later life.
- We should look at where the 'touch points' are, where is it that older people connect and how can we reach those people in a useful and meaningful way?

5. LEARNING FROM OTHERS AND TAKING CONTROL

- What can we learn from people who cope well with transitions and can we apply and develop interventions that help build 'it' in others?
- It may be useful to focus on those who handle transitions badly, and those who are particularly successful, and learn more about where and when people are going to be receptive to help to build their own resilience.
- Services are over-stretched with people seeking help and support – if we can learn from those that manage changes well and share this, it may help other individual's take more control and responsibility when they experience major changes.

6. WHERE TO BEST COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE

- In terms of solutions, we need to explore the opportunities to offer support and information to people.

Next steps

Ageing Better is now considering how to progress its work programme on Managing Major Life Changes. Initial priorities for next steps identified at the roundtable included:

- Strengthen the evidence base on what factors predict an individual's ability to successfully make their way through a major life change – and therefore identify modifiable risk factors that interventions can look to target.
 - Synthesise the evidence on current measures to then allow the development of new measures that can sit within a toolkit for researchers.
 - Start to think about the ability to manage changes as a process – 'the resilience trajectory' – so when looking at supporting and developing interventions we consider processes rather than individual events.
 - Further scope where and when people are most receptive to preparing for life changes.
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