

Social Capital and Subjective Well-being – Informal and Formal Senior Networks in Comparison

German society is getting older and older. Already, 39 percent of our population is over 67 years old. In 2040, according to the Federal Statistical Office, it will be 42 percent. A tendency is emerging. And so seniors become a strong and therefore important subgroup of our population.

The increasing age and the exit from the working life means for many people a change of their way of life. They lose social contacts and thus for the most part the connection to society: seniors become a marginalized group. In order to counteract this development so-called senior citizen cooperatives have been founded in many places. These groups are an institutionalized opportunity for seniors to make (new) contacts and support each other, for example in shopping, gardening or housework. Social contacts are an important resource of human life (Lin), and a person's network can affect one's well-being (Putnam and Helliwell).

The goal of this research project is therefore to investigate how seniors of different age groups (65-75 years / 76-85 years / 86 years +) are connected. Therefore a senior citizens' association is used as a comparison group to determine how institutionalized networks differ from non-institutionalized networks. Furthermore the social integration of seniors in terms of their well-being is examined. The current state of research answers this question only inadequately, because well-being is a latent construct that needs to be defined.

Network analysis is an appropriate way to capture the social embeddedness of the elderly. In this work, the self-centered networks of individual seniors are to be recorded by means of questionnaire-based face-to-face interviews. These are supported by tape recordings. For each research group (non-member / cooperative member), 30 persons from Rheinland-Pfalz and Hessen are interviewed. The interviews are analyzed and evaluated with SPSS and Grounded Theory.