

This assignment will initially explore the complexity that encompasses the ability to define old age (Lemoine, 202), as this varies globally (United Nations, No Date); World Health Organisation, No Date a; British Medical Association, 2016; Ouchi *et al.*, 2017; Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2019), Noting the old age is argued to be viewed as social constructionist perspective (Phillipson, 1991), whilst also viewed as a natural evolutionary process (Greco, D'Onofrio and Sancarolo, 2018). Through ageing there many aspects that can contribute to the decline of one's mental health, notably, dementia, depression, and abuse (Macdonald, 1997), therefore these will be explored. However, with growing concerns of the increasing older generation population, concern have arisen from a social policy perspective (Hamblin, 2016). It is believed that the global initiative to encourage healthy aging, could help alleviate the burden on social policy (Hogan and Bradfield, 2018), whilst safeguarding measures have become legislated to increase wellbeing (Care Council for Wales, 2017; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2020). Nevertheless, social isolation, a further concern to old people's mental health decline, was highlighted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and has since transpired that more older people are now experiencing mental health concerns as a result of being labelled vulnerable due to their classification through being old (Coughli and Yoquinto, 2020, cited in Previtali, Allen and Varlamova, 2020).

Defining old age is a complex matter (Lemoine, 2020), on a macro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) there are various definitions deliberated upon globally. Therefore, old age in Africa, a developing country (Kowal and Dowd, 2001) which is also known as a peripheral country within the world systems theory (Benjamin, 2006), typically defines old age as being between the ages of 50 and 55 (World Health Organisation, No Date), however in contrary, Japan, a developed (Minani, 1986) and core country within the world systems theory (Ikeda, 2004), defines old age as individuals being 75 years old and over (Ouchi *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2019); World Health Organization (No Date a); United Nations (No Date) argue that a homogenous definition of old age is necessary, and as such it is agreed that individuals over 65 years of age are defined as being an older person, and as such at a mezzo level (Bronfenbrenner 1979), a definition of old age in the United Kingdom has also been considered to be 65 (British Medical Association, 2016), where Larkin (2009) contends that this had been utilised for statistical and strategic policy purposes, however Banks and Smith (2006) would argue that old age was, historically, considered the age where individuals would retire.

Nevertheless, due to demographic shifts (Galor, 2012) and the requirement to continue working to ensure financial stability in old age (Shultz, 2003), the default retirement age (Sargeant, 2010; Cribb and Emmerson, 2017) was abolished through the *Employment Equality (Repeal of Retirement Age Provisions) Regulations 2011* (Barrett and Sargeant, 2015), however with the ideology of that the state pension is no longer sustainable (Hamblin, 2016), a change in policy was mandatory, and through legislations, the *Pensions Act of 2007, 2011, and 2014*, the state pension age now differs, and currently retirement age is considered to be between 65 and 68, however this is set to increase, year on year, depending on one's year of birth (The Pension Advisory Services, No Date). Then again, at a micro level (Bronfenbrenner 1979), Wales is devolved from the United Kingdom (Civil Service, No Date; Mitchell, 2011), from the Welsh perspective, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2019) considers an older person to be aged 60 or over, however, even in Wales, if old age was to be considered from the pension age, then it would be the United Kingdom's definition that would be deliberated upon, as the social security provision is a matter that is reserved to be dealt with by the United Kingdom government (Wales Centre for Public Policy, 2020).

This aforementioned exploration to define who an older person may be, is observed from the social constructionist perspective (Phillipson, 1991), which is derived from the symbolic interactionist perspective (Galbin, 2014), which asserts that meanings are constructed from the interactions between individuals and then the ideology is circulated through society (Burr, 2015; Giddens and Sutton, 2017a), however when different meanings are encountered, it creates doubt, with what is real and/or true, which is described as the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), where it is possible to question if anything that is alleged is true or not, however due to common consensus, an ideology that is agreed upon, therefore becomes reality. Consequently, the aforementioned definitions of old age are considered to be a social construction due to the varying differences between global definitions. However, in contrary, ageing is a natural biological process, even though it is an undesirable process, it is inevitable, and considered as a part of the evolutionary process (Greco, D'Onofrio and Sancarolo, 2018), which is described as a process which commences at time of conception and terminates upon mortality (WHO, 2019).

From a functionalist perspective, becoming an older person is related with the withdrawal from societal structures, for example, the termination of employment, this is known as the disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry, 1961), yet it is not only when an older person withdraws from society, there is a mutual withdrawal, where society also disengages with the older generation. This ideology was historically considered as being necessary, when the older generation ceased employment, there would be an opportunity for the younger generation to enter the labour market (Atchley, 1982), as well as needing to amend their lifestyles to consider the mental and physical decline that has been observed through ageing (Bounda *et al.*, 1999).

Due to the growth in the ageing population (United Nations, 2017), which is occurring at a substantial speed, there has consequently been a shift in demographics, the study of population with a focus upon age (Podlazov, 2017). From the meso level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), there were 11.8 million people aged 65 and over in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2018), and from a micro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), there was approximately 830,000 older people in Wales during 2017 and 2018 (Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 2019). However, it is projected that by 2066 the population of 65-year-olds and over in the United Kingdom would be 20.4 million (Office for National Statistics, 2018), with the Welsh population projection to be around 1,008,000 of over 60-year-olds by 2066. The ever-increasing ageing population can be attributed due the worldwide aim in promoting successful ageing (von Faber *et al.*, 2001), which includes advancements to medical provisions (Broody, 1978; Hamblin, 2016), which therefore contributes to an increase in life expectancy (Hamblin, 2016; Giddens and Sutton, 2017a), along with declining fertility rates (Larkin, 2009; Giddens and Sutton, 2017a).

When considering individuals over a particular age, they are described as being "old", and as already noted above "older", as well as terms such as "elderly" and "vulnerable" (Larkin, 2009), these can be considered as labelling terms (Tinker, 1997). Labelling theory is associated with utilising various terminology to describe the characteristics that someone can be identified by (Giddens and Sutton, 2017b), which originates from the work of crime and deviance (Paternoster and Bachman, 2017), however it has broadened to be applicable to many topics within sociological studies. Due to being associated with the crime and deviance perspective, labelling theory is most often seen as a negative ideology (Ward, 1977) which is accompanied by a stereotypical attitude (Schonfield, 1982). When applying this ideology to older people, it

is often perceived that older people are understood to all be the same, however this is impossible, as each individual has differentiating characteristics, the only commonality would be of being an age that is considered to be “older” (Voss, Bodner and Rothermund, 2018), yet it is argued by Gee (2002) that there are numerous misconceptions surrounding ageing. This form of discrimination, that based upon age is known as ageism (Nelson, 2016), which is a protected characteristic of the *Equality Act 2010*, which aims to combat the age inequalities that exist (Griffith, 2010).

Additionally, a term already noted above, “vulnerable” is utilised as a label (Tinker, 1997; Purdy, 2004). A definition of vulnerable has been difficult to agree upon (Purdy, 2004; Larkin, 2009), as it is considered that each individual is susceptible to becoming vulnerable at any stage in life (Rogers, 1997; Pritchard, 2001). However, discourse surrounding vulnerability, most often relates to the ideology of individuals being at risk, in danger, under duress, prone to dilemmas, defenceless, and in need of support and/or protection (Rogers, 1997; Spiers, 2000; Mawby, 2004; Grundy, 2006), with it be concurred that labelling is easily attached to those who are considered as being ‘most helpless and least powerful members of society’ (Jones and Bradbury, 2018, p.110-111), however this can be useful when additional support is required.

From an individualistic perspective, Cuddy and Fiske (2004) believe that approaching old age comes with the feeling of dread, with (Phillipson, 2013) arguing that the concerns that accompany ageing are, economic, social, and health, of which both physical and mental concerns arise, these concerns can become apparent individually or amalgamated. As per the assignment brief the concerns that need to be addressed are that of mental health in old age, however, mental health concerns can impact individuals of any age (Mental Health Foundation, No Date). Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation (2018) as being in a state of positive psychological and emotional wellbeing, where an individual can realise their own abilities, be able to manage daily life stresses, and be able to participate and contribute within their community, and in contrary mental health problems arise when an individual cannot manage to achieve the aforementioned definition.

The common mental health conditions observed in older people are dementia, anxiety, depression, delirium, abuse and psychotic disorders and emergencies (Macdonald, 1997;

World Health Organization, 2017), yet Burns, Denning and Baldwin (2001) contends that depression is the most common, three of these will now briefly be explored.

Depression can be observed through biological symptoms which consists of sleep patterns changing, particularly with the inability to sleep, weight loss through reduced appetite, and a change in one's daily mood, particularly in the morning when one has difficulty with sleeping, there have also been observations of slowing down in physical and mental ability, which is not impacted by other conditions, with some individuals being affected by suicidal thoughts (Macdonald, 1997; Karlin and Fuller, 2007).

Dementia is a disorder, characterised by an array of symptoms and indicators, which is resulted from several other conditions, mostly owing to Alzheimer's disease and vascular disease. This disorder is observed through the decrease of memory, thinking, intellectual capacity, difficulties in creating judgement, and a failure to maintain personal and social relations (Macdonald, 2007;), with this disorder being one of the most common cause of disability (Passos, Sequeira and Fernandes, 2012).

Abuse in the older population, can be perceived as the decline in respect and that of ageist ideology (World Health Organization, No Date b). With the perception that the elderly become vulnerable, they become susceptible to being abused (Mysyuk, Westendorp and Lindenburg, 2016), where abuse can be in the form of financial, sexual, or physical (Martins *et al.*, 2014), and it is difficult to ascertain the true prevalence of the occurrence of abuse, as many of the elderly are wither ashamed to or unable to report (Cooper, Selwood and Livingston, 2008).

With the diverse mental health condition experienced by the older generations of society, it has been observed that there is higher risk of functional loss, hospitalisation, and further decline in health mortality (Parker, 2015), which along with an increasing aging population, concerns have arisen within social policy (Hogan and Bradfield, 2018). Older people are dependant on welfare support, and as such it is argued by Hamblin (2016) that the dependency ration is increasing, which signifies that there are less people of working age to ensure older people are provided for, through the social security system. Although these mental health conditions have been observed, it is considered that early intervention and public awareness is vital to reduce the burden of mental health, through the appropriate support (Kalra *et al.*, 2012), however, it

has been acknowledged that the mental health issues have been under recognized and under treated, even though the provision of support has rapidly and successfully developed (Burns, Denning and Baldwin, 2001).

Hence, it became a global objective to ensure that the promotion of active aging became paramount through the World Health Organisations active ageing framework (Walker, 2002), where it was believed that a positive aging experience could be optimised to enhance the quality of life, pinpointing to participation in the economic, social, and cultural aspects of life (World Health Organisation, 2002). Nevertheless, most recently, the ideology has now been revised and it is now vital to ensure healthy ageing is realised (United Nations Development Programme, 2017), as the World Health Organization (2017) argue that older people can continue playing their part as active member of society, through being valued members of the family, partake in volunteering, and for some the continuation in the labour force.

The World Health Organization (2017) argues that the mental health and wellbeing needs of older people are just as important as any other stage of life, and to promote these it is believed that safeguarding policies can assist (Care Council for Wales, 2017; Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2020). Safeguarding is concerned with ensuring that there are procedures and interventions in place to allow the required support to be obtainable to those who are vulnerable (Stewart and MacIntyre, 2018). However, the need to acknowledge the protection of the elderly is a relevantly modern concept (Gaylard, 2011). Although Baker (1975) argues that physical abuse of the elderly was identified and report during the 1970s, whilst subsequently the identification of sexual abuse of the elderly was disclosed (Brown and Tuck, 1993). It is thereafter the identification of abuse or neglect was documented within the Department of Health guidelines (Gaylard, 2011). Nonetheless, safeguarding became legislated through the *Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006* that protected individuals within England and Wales, however since devolution (Parry, 2016) legislation for safeguarding separated for England and Wales. In England, the local authorities were given duty to encourage individual wellbeing thorough social care practices under the *Care Act 2014* (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2020), whilst in Wales, under the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*, safeguarding must again be delivered by local authorities and their partners to ensure the provision meets the national strategy, through focusing upon a multi-agency collaboration to identify and assigning the services when required (Care Council for Wales, 2017). The variance

between the two legislations, is that of age, *the Care Act 2014* is directed at protecting adults, whereas the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* is directed at individuals of all ages (Clements, 2021).

Treatment of depression is possible (Parker and Fletcher, 2007); however, Macdonald (1997) argues that it is questionable if individuals will respond successfully to treatment. To treat depression, it is most effective to prescribe an antidepressant drug, however this can cause side effects, although it is believed that these will subside in time, which is necessary when it is believed that elderly individuals would require medicating indefinitely (Duval, Lebowitz and Macher, 2006). Yet it is argued that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Interpersonal Therapy are alternative ways to treat depression (Parker and Fletcher, 2007).

It is possible to prevent elderly abuse, however it is noted by Plati *et al.* (2016) that effort and awareness to all surrounding the elderly is necessary, to be able to recognize the signs of abuse. It is argued by Husain and Alee (2018) that appropriate training to identify abuse is vital, so that when abuse is identified, the appropriate intervention can be undertaken.

Most recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic, older people had been advised to shield themselves by staying at home (Coughli and Yoquinto, 2020, cited in Previtali, Allen and Varlamova, 2020), this was also the situation when lockdown restrictions had eased, this was considered necessary due to the concerns of older people's state of vulnerability (Iacobucci, 2020). However, the ideology of social isolation in old age is not novel (Cotterell, Buffel and Phillipson, 2018), yet it is argued that the enforced isolation has been perceived as strange, unusual, and disagreeable by many, as they were unable to socialise with relatives and friends, whilst also impacting on their daily routines, these are aspects that encourage positive wellbeing and mental health (Usher, Bhullar and Jackson, 2020). Isolation is argued to be distinct from loneliness (Tilvis *et al.*, 2012). Isolation is considered to be an objective circumstance, based upon facts, which can be observed through the diminishment of social contacts and relations, particularly that of family and close acquaintances (Cotterell, Buffel and Phillipson, 2018). In contrary, loneliness is perceived as being subjective, this is when an

individual has social networks, yet, has an internal sense of feeling lonely (Tilvis *et al.*, 2012). Yet again, social isolation is not only a concept that older people experience (Simon, 2001; Henry and Convery, 2006; Machielse, 2006; Larkin, 2009) Social isolation has many health implications, these being noted as ill-being (Welsh Government, 2020), and with greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease, stroke (Valtorta *et al.*, 2016), depression (Matthews *et al.*, 2016), dementia (Kuiper *et al.*, 2015), and premature death (Steptoe *et al.*, 2015), however it has been argued that prolonged isolation has further damaging psychological effects (Perrin *et al.*, 2009)

Therefore, whether one is labelled as becoming old, older, elderly, or vulnerable, the decline in mental health has been observed as a part of the natural ageing process (Greco, D'Onofrio and Sancarlo, 2018), associated with disengagement (Cumming and Henry, 1961) and that of a decline in physical health (Phillipson, 2013); however, it was also noted that the decline in physical health also impacts on mental wellbeing (Phillipson, 2013). Nonetheless, the growing concern within social policy (Hamblin, 2016; Hogan and Bradfield, 2018), has highlighted the need to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the older generation, through the ideology of creating a healthier older population who is considered as a worldwide initiative (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Yet, the recent pandemic has had further detrimental effects, on those who were already vulnerable and those who were not vulnerable prior to the pandemic (Coughli and Yoquinto, 2020, cited in Previtali, Allen and Varlamova, 2020), which could be argued that being labelled as vulnerable due to age has had a detrimental effect on older people.

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Module Code: SJSI6020
Assessment Number: 1
Student Number: 2302532

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