

Initial project duration – 34 months – starting from 1 March 2019, new end date 31 December 2022, extended 12 months due to COVID-19

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Sociology, Social Gerontology, Social Policy, Gender Studies

Overview

Social exclusion is a multifaceted social problem with substantial disruptive consequences for individuals and society. One aspect of social exclusion is the exclusion from social relations. Being socially connected is a universal basic human need, but a substantial number of people lack the essential social resources necessary for a healthy and happy life. GENPATH focusses on post-retirement age; a life phase where social inclusion becomes a crucial factor for health and wellbeing. Men and in particular women have an increased risk to be socially excluded after retirement. Women are more often frail, more often widowed, have lower levels of education, have more often disrupted working careers, lower pensions, and less economic resources. The large variation in social exclusion and the varying impact of gender across welfare states indicates a key role of the macro-social context. However, little is known about how precise the welfare state context influences the construction and outcomes of social exclusion. The project aims at analysing the origin of gender differences in the prevalence and generation of exclusion from social relations across European countries, and consequences of this exclusion for health and wellbeing. Findings will inform the scientific debate about gender differences in social exclusion and instruct policies towards a reduction in social exclusion among older men and women.

Progress to date

The project is aiming to achieve its objectives in the initial work packages, however, the possibility to engage with the policymakers and some other stakeholders have been limited. All the partners are working towards the deliverables and will be ready to engage in the processes of societal change, with a special focus on how the results of the project can support the solutions face to face of the new challenges posed by the Covid-19 responses and its influences over the quality of life of older men and women. The project consortium has been very active in proposing the expertise and social analysis on how the Covid-19 responses may influence the social exclusion from social relationships (the Galway appeal IR, CZ) and provided several public commentaries and consultations for governmental bodies. Despite their unplanned nature, these activities have supported the overall objectives of the project.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the timeline of the project as both time points when the qualitative interviews with older research subject have been scheduled fell into the first and second major outbreaks of the pandemic in Europe. The variant developments of governmental responses had made the cooperation of the scientific part of the project challenging. Further, the COVID-19 health crisis has an impact on the results of the project as such since it has directly affected the social relationships and how they are obtained and maintained in our societies. We have broadened our scope to reflect these in our inquiry.

Team members

	Woman	Man	Other
Gender balance in the whole consortium	21 (70%)	9 (30%)	0 (0%)
Presence of women as lead researchers/PIs	3 (37%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)
Gender Experts in the team	2 (66%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)
Team members trained on Gender equality	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	0 (0%)

Contribution to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The research aims at identifying routes of the health and social outcomes of life circumstances for later life quality. As such it will engage with various policy levels, respecting the cultural and welfare specificities, to help to mitigate the effects of social exclusion. The project aims at developing a scientific evidence to strengthen the policy making to reach selected goals within the UN SDG programme, mainly goals set in SDG3 Good health and wellbeing, SDG5 Gender equity, and SDG10 Reduced Inequalities. The results underline the necessity to further address the gendered inequalities in health and (healthy) life expectancy, while recognising the lifelong roots of the health disparities as well as the social exclusion from social relationships. Other two very influential indicators are “trust” and “personal satisfaction with the quantity and quality of the relationships” pointing at the need to address both structural (societal) and individual sources of the social exclusion from the social relationships.

Differences/inequalities between women and men highlighted by the project

The gender differences are one of the key routes to scrutinise the social exclusion from social relationships in our project. Interestingly, there are cultural variations on how gender influences some of the key elements of our inquiry (e.g. loneliness in later life). Why in some cases it is the women, in other men, with higher levels of loneliness and in other no gender differences are found, is a topic for further GENPATH analysis.

Positive impact of the project on gender equality/scientific evidence on gender in the field

The preliminary results, for example, underline the need to address in an interdisciplinary manner the health disparities (eg. sex differences in the life expectancy) as related to / driven by / resulting from the social exclusion from social relationships (eg. the issue of widowhood and loneliness). We will engage in bridging the “health – social divide” experienced in many welfare states contexts. The impact will be achieved by an increase in scholarly knowledge on the differences and similarities in social exclusion from social relations across different dimensions and for different genders, highlighting the key drivers, by pointing out the transitional life course events and drawing the policy roadmap to produce healthier and more content later lives.

Socio-economic impact; involvement of policy makers/civil society

There are several intensive cooperative relationships and synergies within the research teams and civil society in all countries represented in the consortium. The Life 90 (Život 90) a senior and diversity advocacy and lobby organisation is a partner within the consortium. Others serve as gatekeepers and connect the research teams with the older men and women to carry out the research interventions (Hilfswerk, Samariterbund, Rotes Kreuz; Amics de la Gent Gran, etc.). The policy seminars will be held during the 2021-2022 in national languages.

Webpage:

<https://www.muni.cz/vyzkum/projekty/45267>

Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/GenpathTeam>

Czech National Policy Event:

<https://www.giops.cz/konference>

Austria National Policy Event:

<https://www.euro.centre.org/events/detail/4194>

Journal Gender and Research Special Issue:

https://www.gendersonline.cz/artkey/gav-202101-0001_exclusion-from-social-relations-in-later-life-and-the-role-of-gender-a-heuristic-model.php