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# ***Invisible Men: Understanding Older Men's Organisational Involvement in the Community***

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# The research in context

- ❖ Most older men are married but demographic data reveal that in the UK, one in three men over the age of 75 is no longer, or has never been married
- ❖ Lone older men are more susceptible to social isolation and risky health behaviours than married men

# Methods



- ❖ We interviewed a total of 85 men over the age of 65 years, in their homes  
*30 married, 33 widowed,  
12 divorced/separated, 10 never married*
- ❖ We visited 25 of organisations which had older men and women in their membership and spoke to managers/staff and older male members

# These included ...

## ● 'Social'

- Church clubs
- Ex servicemen's clubs
- Day (Senior) Centres  
(*statutory and NGO*)
  - Autumn clubs
  - Luncheon clubs
- Voluntary clubs:
  - Lions
  - Rotary
  - Freemasons

## ● 'Sports and leisure'

- Golf clubs
- Football, rugby, cricket clubs
- Bowls
- Ballroom dancing
- Bridge clubs
- University of the Third Age (U3A)
- Pensioners groups

# Gender and Age, Integration and Segregation

1a) Gender integrated (GI): both sexes belonged and participated in the organisation and these included organisations for which sport/leisure activities may be segregated, but social activity was integrated

**OR**

1b) Gender Segregated (GS): where there is predominance, ie at least 80% of either male or female membership/participation

# Gender and Age, Integration and Segregation

- **AND**

- 2a) *Age Integrated (AI)*: organisations which had participants across all age groups

- **OR**

- 2b) *Age Segregated (AS)*: organisations which cater for specific age groups.

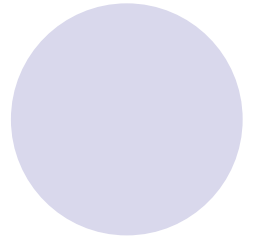
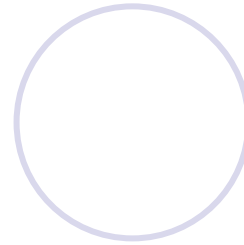
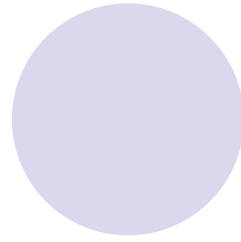
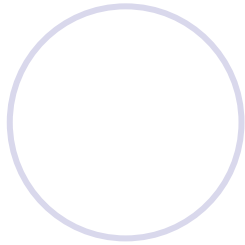
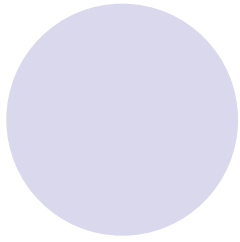
# AGE

# GENDER

		AGE	
		Segregated (AS)	Integrated (AI)
GENDER	Segregated (GS)	<p><b>TYPE 1 (GS+AS)</b></p> <p><i>Predominantly male:</i></p> <p>None</p> <p><i>Predominantly female:</i></p> <p>Luncheon Clubs Autumn Clubs Senior Centres</p>	<p><b>TYPE II (GS+AI)</b></p> <p><i>Predominantly male:</i></p> <p>Royal British Legion Regimental Associations Freemasons Lions/Rotary</p> <p><i>Predominantly female:</i></p> <p>Townswomen's Guild Women's Institute WRVS</p>
	Integrated (GI)	<p><b>TYPE 111 (GI+AS)</b></p> <p>Ballroom Dancing Retirement Fellowships Pensioners Action Groups</p> <p>University of the Third Age (U3A)</p>	<p><b>TYPE IV (GI+AI)</b></p> <p>Golf Clubs Bridge/Cards Sport/Leisure Centres Bowls Horticultural/Cultural Church Groups</p>



**The older men told us what  
they thought about local  
facilities for older people**



**GARETH: 71, widowed**

Yes, well that Day Centre isn't for me. I'm afraid it's **for dear old ladies**. Certainly I wouldn't choose to go there at all. ... No. Looking through the window is enough for me!

**KEVIN: 75, widowed**

No, I don't think so. I suppose the social activity I've got, **there is always the golf club and that's where I meet people and you know with quite similar backgrounds. A lot of civil servants and so on.**

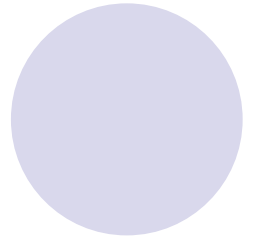
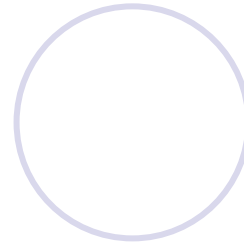
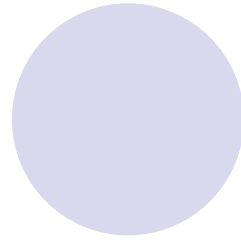
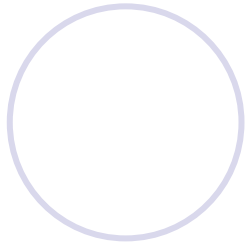
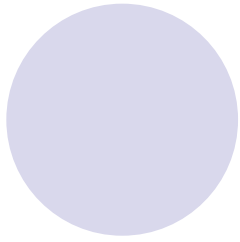


**Jack: 66, married**

It never occurred to me, no. Well I might do, I suppose, if I was left on my own, or something, but not at the moment, no.

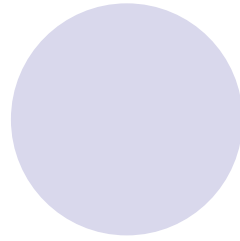
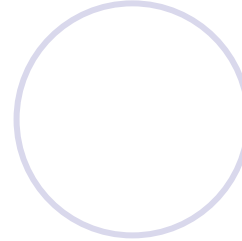
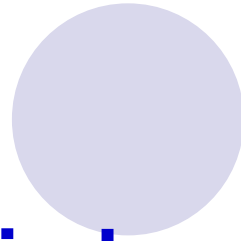
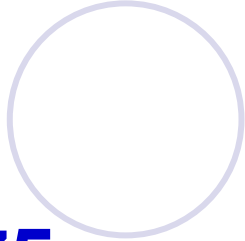
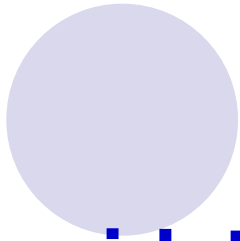
**Dan: 72, divorced**

Well, I really feel that my own personal view people in Day Centres are **just sitting there waiting to die**. ... I mean, OK, maybe I will be pleased to go there at 90, I don't know. If you look at them, they are all sorts of people that – I mean, I am very lucky, I have got my health, haven't I?



## **Bert: 65 never married**

I suppose maybe a bit of snobbishness. I don't feel a need for it. Yes they do good work. They offer opportunities for social contact and they have a mini-bus which brings people in. Services such as hairdressing. And those who haven't got a bath, there's a bath there I understand. Cheap meals which are adequate, but at the moment, I don't feel the need to go there. ... I suppose if I got past doing my own cooking, then I might go, because it's so close, just go around there.

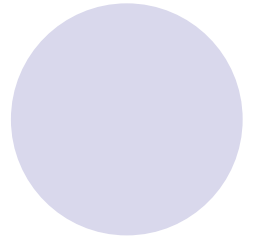
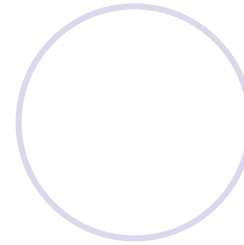
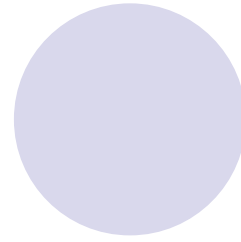
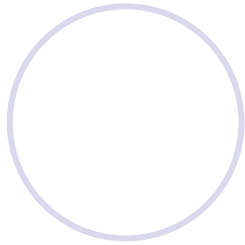
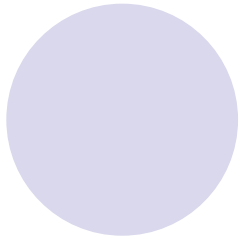


## **David: 75 never married**

I don't know, probably if I got really incapacitated and forgetting. People would take me perhaps by car to the Day Centre to get me out. But it's not something I would do while I can nose around and get about, yes.

## **Clyde: 68, married**

Well, I wouldn't expect to find lively company there and I would like lively company please.

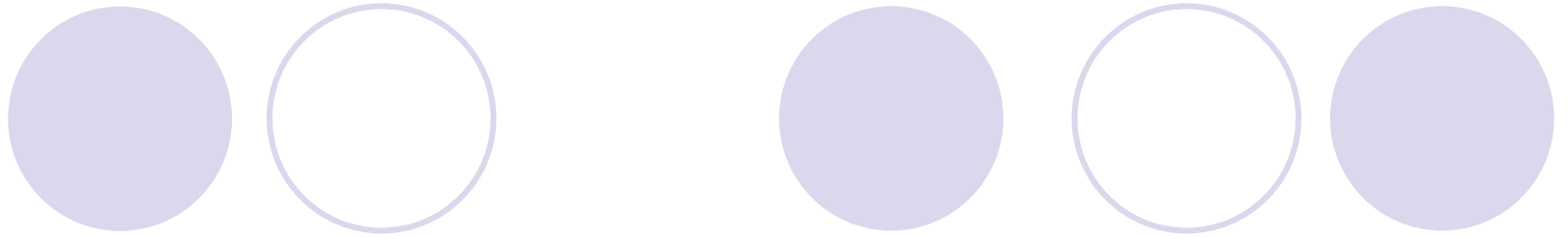


## **Paul: 67, divorced**

I think it's a sad thing that people actually have to go to Day Centres but they do. Some of them are jolly places but they don't appeal to me naturally.

## **Colin: 70, widowed**

I wouldn't be seen dead in a place like that – it means you've given up.



**The view of the older men was supported by one of the Day Centre managers who told us:**

***“For men there’s a stigma attached to coming here. They see the place as a ghetto of old people. And I think men feel threatened by the presence of all these old women.”***

# Social Clubs: Activity and Passivity

- The clubs the men attended tended to be activity orientated: voluntary work, charitable causes, sports, leisure, 'doing something' useful for others or themselves
- Day (Senior) Centres were perceived as places where things were '*done to*' or '*done for*' them. Passive pursuits more suitable for old women (sitting around, chatting, Bingo)



## **Toby: 80, married**

So obviously, one has got to try and convince them that it is a good place to go. Again, you have to consider the fact I was talking about pink and blue earlier. Day Centres tend to be a pink thing, not a blue thing. Clubs would be a blue, not a pink.

# Making Day Centres a 'Blue Thing'

Two senior centres we visited were described by the men as *'just like a normal social club'*

- Name change
- Pool table
- Computer club
- Licence for wine/beer
- Staff did not wear 'uniform'



This led to the men joining in:

- **Line/ballroom dancing**
- **Indoor bowls**

**BUT**

- **Still more likely to be married men who accompanied their wife**
- **There were widowed men, but they tended to be 80+ and not physically active**

**HOWEVER**

- **The managers felt that the men would continue to attend if they were widowed**

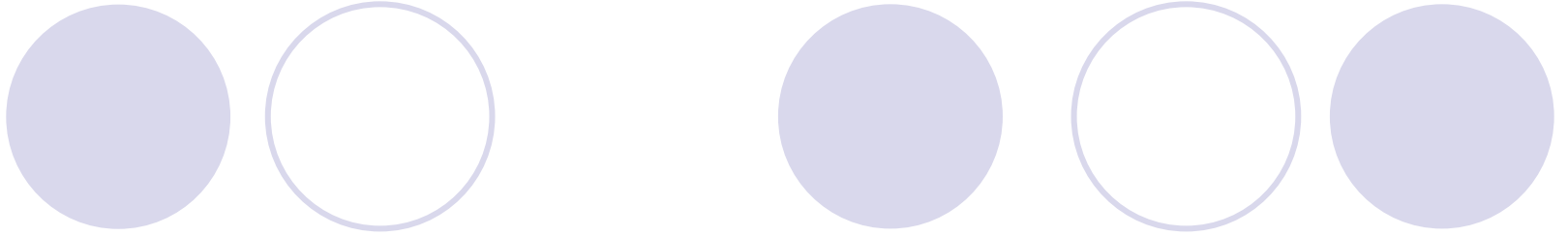
# Conclusions



- ❑ Class, marital status and notions of appropriate masculine behaviour influenced the choice of organisation to which older men belonged.
- ❑ Those social organisations which were not run specifically for older people were geared for members to 'do' something for other people or, in the case of sports and leisure clubs, for themselves.



- ❖ If the older men were no longer sufficiently mobile to be able to continue with their long-standing organisational activities, they were less likely than older women to take advantage of clubs specifically geared to the needs of older people.



- ❖ Consideration should be given by social support organisations, for the development of community activities appropriate to the affective needs of older men who face their latter years alone



***Thank you for listening!***

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