Exploring older women’s citizenship: understanding the impact of migration in later life

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Author(s)
Cook, Joanne

Aims

The study explores older migrant women’s experiences of accessing welfare citizenship and the barriers they encounter in accessing mainstream services. This article examines the impact that migration in later life has on the welfare citizenship of older women. The findings within the paper were obtained from the Older Women's Lives and Voices Study, which was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council’s ‘Growing Older’ Programme.

Methodology

The study was conducted with black Caribbean, Irish, Chinese and Somali older women migrants in Sheffield, Yorkshire, United Kingdom. The study took place between 2000 and 2002. It used interviews and focus groups with women aged 50+ from 5 ethnic communities living in Sheffield, Yorkshire, UK: black Caribbean, white British, Chinese, Irish and Somali. In total, 96 women participated in the study and just over half were from minority ethnic groups. Their migrations occurred at different stages of the life course. The participants were recruited through established community groups. An action research approach was adopted.

Key issues

The article looks at how the migration experience, and the age at which a person moves, shape the welfare preferences, needs and access to welfare services of older migrant women. The study looks at 3 specific areas in relation to older migrant women:

- migration histories and entitlements to welfare citizenship
- experiences of accessing welfare rights and services
- the importance of resourcing communities

Conclusions

The study points that the perceptions and expectations of citizenship are culturally differentiated. The research highlights

the important bridging and enabling roles played by cultural and community organisations in informal welfare support. It emphasises the need for more resources for language services, more support workers from minority communities and training of frontline staff in their patients' and clients' migration backgrounds. Language and communication were found to be the biggest issue for the majority of the older women in the study. The article highlights the need for more recognition of the important enabling role that informal systems of support provided by participation in community or cultural organisations play in the welfare citizenship and agency of minority ethnic older women.

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Migrant Group
Non-EU migrants
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Housing and welfare
Older people
Welfare entitlements
Women
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Sheffield
South Yorkshire
Year
2010
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