

Community-based social innovations for healthy ageing in middle-income countries. What are they and how do they work?

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Summary

There are a number of international drivers that are increasing focus on 'community-based social innovations' (CBSIs) for active and healthy ageing. CBSIs are understood as initiatives that seek to empower older people to improve self-efficacy in caring for themselves and their peers, maintain well-being and promote social cohesion and inclusiveness (Ong et al. 2016). Many middle-income countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations and have health systems that have not typically been designed to meet the needs of older people and/or where older people face significant barriers accessing care. Earlier work by the World Health Organisation in low-income countries suggested that CBSIs may have "the potential to improve care and autonomy for older people, as well as transform healthcare systems" but that more evidence was required to understand this.

Commissioned by the WHO Health and Development Centre, Kobe, Japan, we conducted a systematic review of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of CBSIs in middle- and high-income countries and conducted ten case studies in middle-income countries (China, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Russia, Serbia, Chile, Iran, Ukraine, Lebanon). The systematic review (44 papers) showed that most studies reported interventions having positive impacts on participants, such as reduced depression but that most were at medium or high risk of bias. There was no available evidence on costs and cost-effectiveness and there was very little reporting of outcomes at an organisation or system level. The review also highlighted challenges in defining and conceptualising CBSIs. In order to address this we developed a typology with the aim to (1) provide a definitional and organisational structure to enable researchers and research users to organise evidence; (2) inform decision-makers and implementers at a more operational level by establishing the relative advantages and challenges of different types of CBSIs. I will present this work, drawing on findings from the case studies and systematic review and focus the discussion on lessons around the impact of CBSIs on healthy ageing, linkages with health and social care systems and issues concerning the sustainability and scaling-up of such initiatives.