

Implementing Feminist Gerontology in Group Work

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Introduction

The discriminating and oppressing relation in society towards women compared to men frequently causes women to become invisible [1], which means, not being related to, and not receiving personal, social, professional and economic opportunities. Elderly women are specifically affected, having been dealing with inequalities during all their lives, often having started careers only after they have brought up their children, resulting in severe deprivation, and a greater risk of poverty upon retiring [2]. Discriminating attitudes are often internalized, causing women to lose awareness of their abilities. Moreover, often women are not fully aware of their individual desires and needs, feel limited in expressing themselves, lack self-confidence which makes it difficult for them to take control and make decisions, they feel dependent and that they are more occupied with satisfying other's needs, instead of their own [3]. Subjective wellbeing, health, and life satisfaction may be increased by empowering self-esteem [4-6], which may be reached by training sessions [7].

Such is my experience from psycho-educational workshops I conduct with women aged between 55 and 95. In weekly group meetings, a theoretical introduction on a certain topic is provided and group discussion encouraged. Examples of subjects are body image, emotional intelligence, dealing with authorities, hope, humor, the way to happiness, and assertiveness.

In spite of the non-therapeutic group method, there are clear therapeutic effects. The group's constant character, its empathic interactions, the members' sharing of similar experiences, which provides feelings of commonness, learning interpersonal communication techniques through reciprocal learning from each

other, are basis for change [8]. Most important, the group members started seeing themselves, and identifying their needs and wishes. Consequently, they are more assertive, take more responsibility on their own emotional wellbeing, choose the things that really matter to them, no matter conventions or social norms. They feel more relaxed, and live more according to their needs.

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