

Research Platform for Local Health Care

Work Research Institute
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Title:

**Ensuring a receptive context for participatory action research
as a vehicle for change: the example of community assistance
for the elderly in Sweden.**

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The number of elderly people in Sweden is increasing and as a result there is an increased need for support in the community in the form of assistance with eating, dressing or transport. Such practical issues rarely are the focus of even traditional research but potentially participatory action research can provide a productive way of actively improving the lives of a significant group of largely marginalised people. The challenge is to successfully involve people in such a way that the boundaries between the system (in terms of existing and future provision of social care) and what is experienced or required for daily life, is crossed. Elderly people frontline practitioners in community care are those most likely to come up with solutions to everyday problems as they are experts of what goes on in everyday life. However, the health and social care system is locked into a way of working that reveres clinical and mode 1 type knowledge rather than such everyday knowledge. Even so called evidence based knowledge is rarely adopted in practice.

This paper looks at ways in which the researcher can generate the involvement at all levels in the system to take on board the practical findings that are likely to emerge from a PAR study. The challenge is to set up an appropriate and receptive context for change so that learning takes place in as widest group as possible. Since central to PAR is direct human interaction between participating parties, then moving from learning by a small group to learning in a wider collective presents a particular challenge. Such a challenge

needs addressing at the start of any research process. Sufficient time needs to be set aside to develop the necessary level of trust required amongst potential co-researchers. The study is aimed at a collective understanding of the whole eating situation and what is experienced as an issue in two municipalities in the South of Sweden. By paying special attention to who is involved in the research process and building trust it is hoped that this will maximise learning and the likelihood of the practical implementation of the outcomes of the study process. By laying these foundations in such a way as to anticipate likely barriers to change in terms of eating habits and support for the elderly. PAR as method and way to research which involves the active participation of what in the traditional research process would be called subjects but here they have a way to be directly involved actively in all aspects of the research process and thus able to influence its direction as well as understand and directly choose what to do as a result.

A short paper identifying the practical issues involved and presenting what is being done to create a receptive context for change will form the basis of a participatory workshop looking at the challenges and solution for working in this way in the context of health and social care. The session will fit in with aims 1 and 3 of the conference.