GROWING OLD WITH DRUGS. PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE AGING PROCESS OF DRUG USERS IN OPIOID SUBSTITUTION TREATMENT

Luciani M[1], Pezzoli L[1], Prandi C[1], Di Giulio P[1], Moriggia A[2], Caiata Zufferey M[1]
[1] Scuola Universitaria Professionale, Dipartimento economia aziendale, sanità e sociale, Stabile Piazzetta, Via Violino 11, 6928 Manno (TI)
[2] Fondazione Epatocentro Ticino, Via Soldino 5, 6900 Lugano

Background: In recent years drug users in opioid substitution treatment aged more than 50 years (henceforth PWUD 50+) have significantly increased in Western societies due to the improvement of clinical research, demographic trends and socio-political factors. This emergent population questions the traditional conception of drug addiction as a merely youth problem and raises questions about its specificities and needs. This paper draws on an ongoing sociological study on the aging process of PWUD to explore the trajectories and lifestyles of this population.

Methods: As part of a grounded theory study currently ongoing in Southern Switzerland, 10 biographical interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of PWUD 50+ recruited through several drug institutions. The sample is diversified in terms of gender and current illegal substance use in addition to methadone. Interviews were audiorecorded, fully retranscribed and analysed through constant comparison.

Results: Preliminary results show common features of the PWUD's aging process: *a)* physical and psychological fragilisation, *b)* reduction of social engagement, *c)* death anticipation, *d)* ambiguous relationship with methadone and drug institutions, and *e)* compulsory confrontation with their identity of aging drug addict. Faced with these challenges, PWUD 50+ develop different identity strategies in order to build an image of themselves that is at the same time the most acceptable and coherent with their own life history.

Conclusion: Despite some common features of the aging process, this study underlines the diversity of identity strategies of PWUD 50+ to make sense of their life history and to orient their future actions. These findings could suggest innovative health and social care guidelines based on the lived experience of the PWUD themselves.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: ***See example below:*** The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.
Note: If accepted into the programme you will be requested to include a disclosure of interest slide into your presentation or include such statements in your poster.