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2019
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29324

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Veiled and Vocal: Intergenerational Perspectives on Ageing amongst Muslim Women in South Africa

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Abstract

This thesis is based on a qualitative, exploratory study which sought to find out and analyse how South African Muslim mothers and daughters of Indian descent interpret and understand ageing. The thesis rests on a specially developed theoretical framework which applied the lifecourse perspective, symbolic interactionism and the writings of post-colonial feminism. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used. Data were collected using one-on-one semi-structured interviews with twelve biological mother-daughter pairs.

According to this study, ageing or growing older is more than just a linear process. By profiling Muslim women's expression of their individualised versions of ageing identity, this thesis provides unique insights. It offers exceptional scripts of women of different ages' articulation about themselves or what is told about them. The narratives shared in the study show the malleability of personal constructions of ageing, the meanings attached to events and the transitions that lead women to new and or (re)negotiated social identities in the context of ageing in the lifecourse.

The novel intergenerational perspective adopted is geared towards understanding the sociological process of ageing between two generations within the South African setting. The findings show that South African Muslim mothers' and daughters' constructed personal definitions of ageing were influenced by their individual life histories. Personal retrospect was shown to have facilitated how the ageing experience was perceived resulting in renewed ideas of the ageing experience.

Intergenerational perspectives on ageing emerged consistently throughout the thesis and thus provided evidence of pollination of views on ageing across generations. Findings showed the multidimensionality of ageing in the context of participants' experiences thus providing evidence for alternate imageries and individualised versions of ageing thereby making a novel contribution to bodies of knowledge focusing on progressive gerontological research.

The thesis concludes that the socio-cultural contexts of the two generations of Muslim women in the study was shown to have mutability and bearing on their interpretation of ageing and their ageing selves and therefore recommends future areas of ageing research in order to attain a more nuanced, alternate and socio-cultural perspectives of ageing in the South African context and especially amongst minority groups.