A Cross-cultural Study
Exploring Structural Factors of Men’s Sheds

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Overview

Abstract

Background
- What is a Men’s Shed and its purpose
- How has the program grown
- What are the benefits

Method
- Procedure
- Participants

Results

Conclusion
The Men’s Shed program was developed in Australia in 2006 with the explicit goal of establishing a place for men to socially interact and to help maintain their health and well-being. The program has achieved tremendous success and has continued to grow to a variety of other countries. To date, there has been a limited research conducted on the Men’s Shed program, particularly from a cross-cultural perspective. Studies related to Men’s Sheds have not addressed the structural or organizational features of these programs. The aim of this study is to conduct a descriptive, cross-cultural study on Men’s Shed organizations and the characteristics of the Men’s Shed participants. Knowledge about this organization for men may be helpful for the development of similar program within the US. In conclusion, we were able to determine the following about the Men’s Shed characteristics: the programs are volunteer-based; there are many variations in the way they are operated; typically fees are charged but the amount varies widely; the main activities, programming, and benefits are relatively similar; and two-thirds of the men participating in the Men’s Shed are still married.
Significance

Research has shown that men’s health and well-being is worse than women (Wilson & Cordier, 2013).

Having poor social supports is a risk factor for people and increase the development of illness and premature death at each stage of life (Ballinger, Talbot & Glenda, 2009).
Loneliness

63% of adults aged 52 or over who have been widowed, and 51% of the same group who are separated or divorced report, feeling lonely some of the time or often.

59% of adults aged over 52 who report poor health say they feel lonely some of the time or often, compared to 21% who say they are in excellent health.

(Campaign to End Loneliness, n.d.)
Research shows that loneliness and social isolation are harmful to our health:

- Lacking social connections is a comparable risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity.

(Campaign to End Loneliness, n.d.)
Suicide

- Older men have the highest completed suicide rates compared to all other ages.
- Common risk factors include:
  - The recent death of a loved one
  - Physical illness, uncontrollable pain or the fear of a prolonged illness
  - Perceived poor health
  - Social isolation and loneliness
  - Major changes in social roles (e.g. retirement)

(American Association of Suicidology, 2009)
White men over the age of 85, were at the greatest risk for suicide of all age-gender-race groups in 2006. That was 2.5 times the current rate for men of all ages.

Elderly white men were at the highest risk with a rate of approximately 31 suicides per 100,000 each year.

84.6% of elderly suicides were male; the rate of male suicides in late life was 7.7 times greater than for female suicides.

(American Association of Suicidology, 2009)
Developed in 2006 in Australia, the Men’s Sheds has now spread out to other countries including: Ireland, the UK, and New Zealand.

Visions for the program include:

- Transitioning to retirement
- Social interaction
- Health and wellbeing through activities
- Address men’s issues within the communities, especially when dealing with health
- Create opportunities for individuals to have a sense of continued worth within the community
Typical activities found in the program:

- Metal work
- Wood work
- Computers
- Painting
- Automotive repair
- Social Time: biscuits and tea
The purpose of this study was to conduct a descriptive, cross-cultural study on Men’s Shed organizations and the characteristics of the Men’s Shed participants.
Methods

Cross sectional cross cultural survey using Survey monkey, an online survey tool.

Participation required 15-20 minutes to fill out the survey during one session.

Data collection was completed over 3 weeks.
Men’s Shed Directors were surveyed from online public information regarding Men’s Shed.

Three countries chosen were Ireland, United Kingdom, and New Zealand. These were chosen due to their program longevity and online availability of contact information.

The survey had a 67% response rate, with 26 out of 39 participants completing it.
Results

Marital Status

- Married: 69%
- Divorced: 20%
- Widowed: 11%
Activities Ranked #3

- Socializing: 43%
- Woodwork/woodturning/metal work: 22%
- Repairs: 14%
- Other: 21%
Months in Operation: Range 2 months-72 months

Volunteers Range: 0-41 per Men’s Shed

Participants Range: 4-60 per week Men’s Shed
Youngest Participant Ages
Range: 8-62 years old

Oldest Participant Ages
Range: 70-98 years old
Conclusions

- Basic characteristics
- Features cross-culturally
- Similarities and differences
- Benefits of the Men’s Shed Program
- Futures for Men’s Sheds in the US
- “To be aware that a man's mental health is to be treated differently to that of a woman is very important”.
Men’s Shed Value

- The shed allows men to re-engage in social and meaningful work based activities which combats isolation, depression and social exclusion.

- Each other's company; Having a place to go; Having something to do.
“It is an opportunity for men to meet together to do and talk about things of mutual interest. It helps to tackle social isolation and has been used by other statutory bodies as a suitable place for men with mild mental health [depression, anxiety] issues and also issues of confidence to attend. We are able to offer a place for people with health and mobility limitations - through illness of disability - to come and engage with other men.”
…a venue where men can meet together in a familiar environment to do things together, using their own skills and expertise and benefiting from those of their colleagues. We don't see ourselves as 'volunteers' so much as mates working together. We help one another and individuals and groups in the community.

It's incredible to discover the range of skills & knowledge amongst the group, from former employment & hobbies - what value!!

The men's shed is probably the best thing that could happen to someone that is alone or just wants a coffee and a chat
Implications

Implications in the US what does this mean?
We would like to thank our Chair member Dr. Maureen Mickus, Associate Professor for the Occupational Therapy Department for exposing us to Men’s Sheds in Ireland during our study abroad experience and for helping us conduct our Honors Thesis.

