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Research notes: A Doctoral Dissertation of Social Work Approved at the University of Eastern Finland

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Ylä-Outinen, Tuulikki 2012. Everyday Life of Elderly People: Older people's own experiences in everyday life at home and in sheltered housing for older people. Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies No 48. Kuopio. (Written in Finnish with as English abstract)

The study dealt with elderly people's experiences in everyday life at home and in sheltered housing, especially their experiences in moving to sheltered housing. The knowledge production was based on narrative approach. The research material consisted of interview-based stories of elderly persons born between 1920 and 1934, nineteen of whom were living at home and eight had moved to sheltered housing.

The study showed that the elderly who have moved from home to sheltered housing experience the move in very different ways. Most of them felt that the move to sheltered housing increased both their feeling of security and quality of life. Some of the sheltered housing residents could not gain control over the new surroundings. The elderly living in their own home described sheltered housing as a necessary place for those in need of assistance but did not personally want to move there.

The continuation of their own lifestyle strengthens the feeling of security of the elderly. Insecurity was mostly caused by factors related to livelihood and coping. Some coped with limited financial and other resources, but for others even a large income did not bring a feeling of security. The experience of personal health and functioning varied as well.

The lifestyle formed in the course of life is linked with the quality of life and well-being. The study brought up several things which improve the well-being of the elderly. The problems which lessen well-being were related to housing, environment, health, functioning, social relationships and

societal change. In the narratives of the elderly, these commonly shared experiences were combined with each narrator's personal life-story.

The study formed eight ideal types, each realising a different lifestyle. The types demonstrated differences in, for example, resources, physical functioning, social interaction, time use, experiencing personal health and well-being, use of medicines, use of services, and general outlook on life. The types could be formed into four different groups, with varied experiences of assistance need and possibilities of acting independently. Independent copers needed no external help, while those in need of assistance could not cope without a helper. Those relying on help from others did not know how to use or could not use their own resources, while those relying on self-help did not want assistance even when their condition deteriorated.

Assessing and preparing for the different housing and service needs of the elderly is an important question from the perspective of both an individual citizen and government. The results of the study can be used in gerontological social work in particular, but also in developing and organising social and health services, and housing services. The information gained from elderly people's world of experiences can be helpful in supporting their own action and finding the right type and timing of support measures.

All in all, the study provided not only scientifically-significant but also practical information on elderly people's everyday needs. This information may be useful for development of gerontological social work in theory and practice.