

Determinants of Active Aging



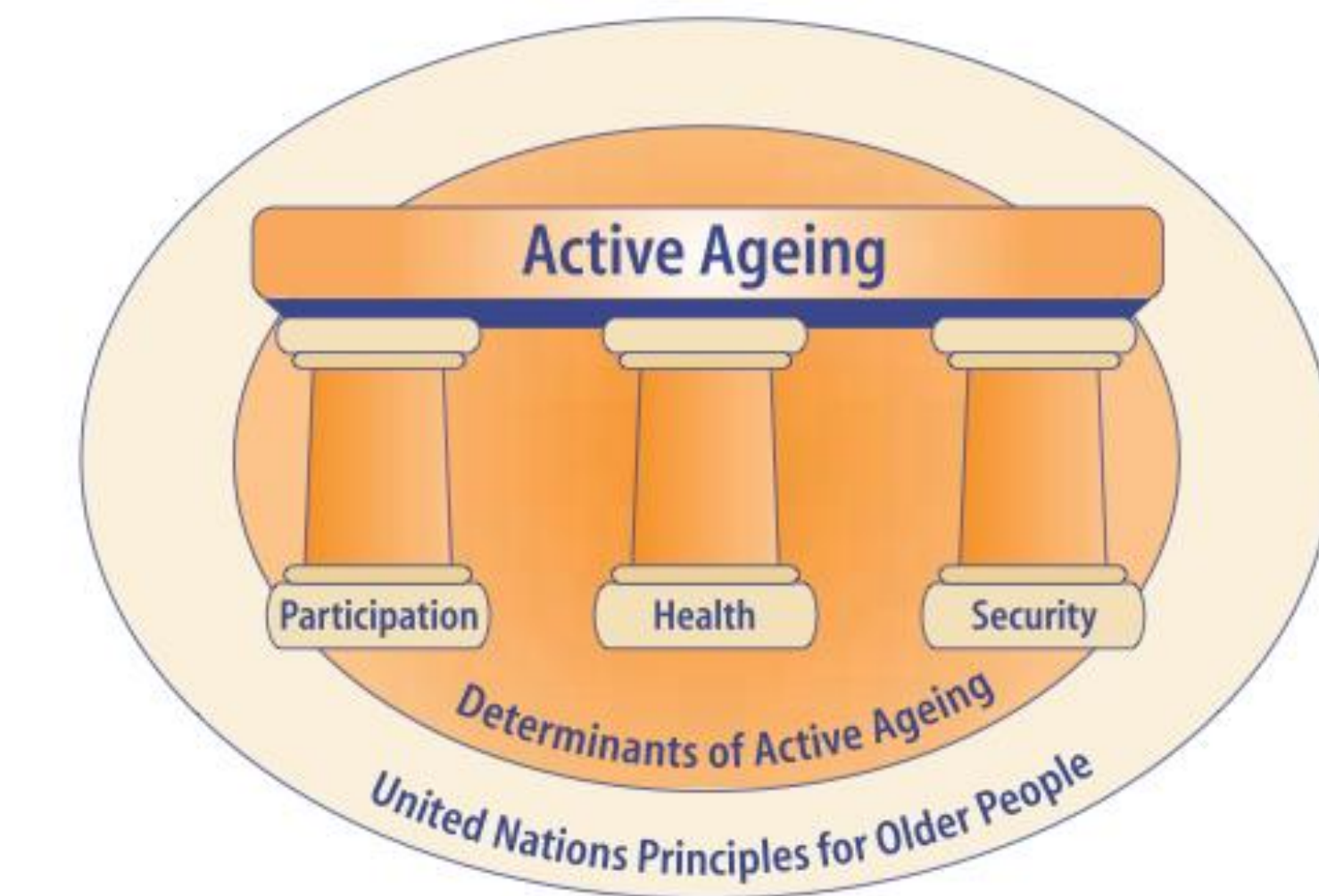
- **Active Aging is more than physical activity;**
- It also refers to continued social, economic, and cultural participation

Active Aging

“Active ageing is the process of optimizing opportunities for **health**, **participation** and **security** in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”

- Part of the WHO's Ageing & Life Course Programme

Pillars of a Policy Framework



Physical activity, Leisure & Active Aging

Getting Involved & Staying Involved: Women's Narratives of Physical Activity across the Life Course

• An ethnography of a nationally successful women's-only running organization

Methods

- Multi-method ethnographic approach
- Participant observation
- Informal & formal interviews
- Case studies
- Photo elicitation & autophotography

Getting Involved: Critical Moments

Why did women join when they did?

***Word of mouth** – positive experiences of friends and acquaintances passed onward and trusted.

***Exposure to the promotional material of the group** – hailed by images and language used and persuaded to sign up (Griffin, 2010).

***Critical moment: being hailed at a specific and significant point in time** – many participants reported the consequential character of particular events within their lives as being why they chose to 'take action.'

These events took a multitude of forms.

As one example, milestone birthdays served as an impetus for many participants:

“I reached 50 and needed something else in my life...”
“I didn't want to hit the bit 6-0 and just slip into a gradual decline!”

Staying Involved: Embodied Learning

Important for the majority of participants is not just getting involved in physical activity, but staying involved as familiar and unfamiliar barriers, setbacks, or constraints are encountered.

Many women described how they had tried (a variety of activities) in the past, and then given up – because they either felt unsuccessful in the activity, or as though they were not progressing as desired.

“I didn't think it was something you could learn – I thought running was something you could either do or you can't.”

Participants *learned* to run via:

- Building up slowly and safely
- Advice & information on nutrition, stretching, & recommendations for shoes and clothing
- Formal, coach-led sessions & informal contact and conversation with existing running group members.

Learning took place on numerous levels –beyond mere informational knowledge transfer (i.e., 'this style of socks won't give you blisters').

Within the running group, women described learning how to be in their bodies in a new way: a way in which they were unfamiliar with, and – in many cases – initially resistant to.

Companion Animals & Active Aging

Pet ownership and other forms of companion animal engagement have been increasingly understood as playing a role in **active aging**. Although research is limited, there is some evidence to suggest that there are emotional, physical, psychological, and economic benefits to engaging with companion animals into late life.

Research on Aging & Companion Animals

- Research since the 1980s on companion animals and older adults has concentrated on therapeutic benefits.
- Recent resurgence in studies on human and animal bond and its relationship with aging, older populations and across the life course.
- Current research includes clinical trials, the effectiveness of animal assisted intervention programs, and integrated health care for pets and people under the rubric of One Health.

Benefits of Companion Animals in Late Life

1. Increased self-esteem
2. Improved life satisfaction
3. Positive mood
4. Relaxation & bonding
5. Improved nutrition
6. Increased Social Capital

Engaging with Companion Animals Can Also...

- Decrease loneliness
- Lower Blood pressure
- Assist with bereavement and grief
- Reduce depression
- Reduce anxiety
- Lower costs to healthcare system

International Federation on Aging Video

Collaborative efforts are going toward raising public awareness of the contribution of companion animals in the lives of older adults. A following video is designed to educate people about pets and active aging. Search for “International Federation on Aging and youtube”.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odJWfSvkKxo>

Ongoing Research Questions

- **Community programs** – how can we build effect community-based programs that involve companion animals?
- **Pathogen effects** – What are the risks of disease associated with companion animals?
- **Animal's health** – How can we ensure that the companion animals' health is a priority in addition to the safety of the human companions?
- **Cultural differences** – What socio-cultural differences do we need to consider when implementing companion animal programs?