

MASTER'S THESIS

'Old people' in the talk of helping professionals in Hong Kong

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'Old People' in the Talk of Helping Professionals in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional construction of old age in Hong Kong. In-depth interviews were conducted with a group of helping professionals composed of six medical practitioners and six social workers. Open-ended, unstructured questions related to professional practice were asked to each of them. Discourse analyses are carried out to examine the images of 'old age' and the identity implications for older people in the talk of different professionals. It is found that the category 'old people' in their talk refers to a special and problematic group of people which is different and separable. Two recurrent ways of talking about age are identified from the spoken material of the professionals. The theme of the medical practitioners represents 'old age' in terms of medical problems. Accordingly, sickness is the recurrent feature of the few subject positions available for older people who are expected to have poor health conditions. The theme of the social workers associates 'old age' with the experience of loss. Accordingly, passive acceptance is the recurrent feature of the few strategies advocated for older people who are expected to adjust to life's changes.

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