STUDY OF AGE FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS (SAFE)

STUDY REPORT
MAY 2019

<u>**SCOPING STUDY**</u>

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INTRODUCTION

Ireland's population has been getting steadily older since the 1980's. This demographic shift is due to a range of factors including improved diet, better health care, medical and technological advances. As a result of these shifts in the demographics of Ireland there has been a concomitant increase in interest by policy makers, academics, the community sector, and professional organisations, in supporting older persons in Ireland. Just like other areas in Ireland, Cork city is experiencing ageing within its population structure. According to Census 2016 the average age in Ireland has risen to 37.4 years. In 2011 there were 17,950 aged 65 and over age living in Cork City; this amounted to 15% of the city's population of 119,230. In 2016 this number increased by 9.9% to 19,727, amounting to 5.7% of the city's population of 125,657 (see table 1).   The percentage of the population aged 65 or over in Cork City (15.5%) was higher than the national percentage (13.3%).

Table 1: Population by age group, number and percentage of that population by Cork City population and the National population in 2016

Age range	Cork City (n)	Cork City (%)	National (n)	National (%)
65-69	5,724	4.5%	211,236	4.4%
70-74	4,906	3.9%	162,272	3.4%
75-79	4,044	3.2%	115,467	2.4%
80-84	2,919	2.3%	81,037	1.7%
85 years and over	2,134	1.6%	67,555	1.4%
Total	19,727	15.5%	637,567	13.3%

Source: Census 2016 [1]

The dependency ratio for those aged 65 years and older has increased for Cork City and nationally between 2011 and 2016 (see Table 2). The dependency ratio measures the number of those aged above 65 years (currently defined as *old age*) as a share of those between 15 to 64 years (currently defined as *working age*). In other words, this ratio tells us how many retired people a potential worker has to sustain. The dependency ratio figure remains higher for Cork City at 22.4% compared to the national average at 20.4%. The increase in the old dependency ratio is indicative of an aging population, which may signify a

population who are living longer possibly with more health care needs, increased isolation, and issues of personal safety which is pertinent to this scoping study.

Table 2: Old Dependency Ratio for Both Sexes, Cork City 2011 and 2016

65 years and older by gender	2011 Ratio	2016 Ratio
Both Sexes	21.4	22.4
Male	18.2	19.7
Female	24.6	25.2

Source: Census 2011 and 2016 [2, 1]

According to the Cork City Profile (2018) [4] in 2006 and 2011 one in seven persons was aged 65+ in Cork City. In 2016 the ratio was one in six in Cork City (15.7%) and one in seven for both Cork City and Suburbs and the State.

The ED of Fair Hill B was the Electoral Division with the highest proportion of those aged 65+ in Cork City in 2006, 2011 and 2016. With almost a third of its population falling into this age group at each census it was the 'oldest' ED in the city.

For each census under review, Bishopstown C was the ED with the highest number of those aged 65 and over and, along with Glasheen C, Mahon C and Bishopstown E, numbers increased with each census (Table 3). In 2016, Glasheen C had a high proportion and a relatively high number of older persons.

Table 3: Electoral Districts with the highest proposrtions of those Aged 65+ (Source: CSO)

2006	%65+	2011	%65+	2016	%65+
Fair Hill B	31.9%	Fair Hill B	32.2%	Fair Hill B	31.5%
Togher B	30.7%	Togher B	29.0%	Bishopstown D	29.1%
Turners Cross D	29.5%	Tramore A	28.7%	Glasheen C	27.7%
Tramore A	28.6%	Glasheen C	27.9%	Montenotte B	27.1%
Browningstown	25.0%	Turners Cross D	26.8%	Bishopstown C	26.4%

Source: Census 2006 and 2011 [3, 2]

While this increase in longevity is something to be celebrated, an ageing population also brings great challenges. A recent national survey of older people highlighted that 21.3% of older people living in Cork City have had an experience that left them concerned about their personal safety [5]

As a result of this national survey and to facilitate healthy, safe and positive ageing, the Cork Age Friendly Alliance requested that Cork Healthy Cities would lead an inter-agency partnership to explore perceptions of safety amongst older people living in Cork and to develop an action plan to address the key issues. The SAFE Project steering group was established with this purpose and began by engaging with University College Cork to conduct a scoping study to explore the issue further.

Study Aim

To explore older people's perceptions of safety in Cork City and surrounding areas and establish an evidence base for solutions aimed at addressing any evident safety issues and concerns.

This study had three main research questions:

1. Do older people in Cork city feel safe?
2. What are the concerns of older people regarding safety, security and comfort*?
3. What can be done to make Cork city a safer place to live?

*Comfort denotes subjective feelings associated with the issues of safety and security, and not restricted to objective issues of safety and security. The research team felt it was important to explore issues that were subjective to the participants, allowing for a more rounded discussion of the issues explored in this scoping study.

METHODS

The research group conducted a qualitative study to explore older people's perceptions of safety in Cork City and surrounding areas and establish an evidence base for solutions aimed at addressing any evident safety issues and concerns.

To do this we conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured means that we used a topic guide to guide the discussions but we were flexible to exploring new perspectives as they came up during the discussions. The topic guide was initially developed based on existing research in the area and then further changed and refined by all project partners (to view the topic guide see Appendix).

Data collection

Interviews:

We conducted two interviews with Friendly Call Cork volunteers (4 participants in total). Friendly Call Cork is a free service providing a phone call 5 days a week which is available to older people or individuals who may feel lonely, isolated and vulnerable in Cork city and surrounding areas. Interviews with Friendly Call Cork volunteers took place at the Cork City Partnership offices in Churchfield Cork.

Focus groups:

We conducted four focus groups with people aged 65 and over living in Cork city and surrounding areas (40+ participants in total). These focus groups took place with at Nano Nagle Place (11 participants), Mahon Community centre (4 participants), Turners Cross Day Centre (5 participants) and NICHE Community Health Project (20+ Participants).
All interviews and focus groups were co-ordinated and facilitated by experienced UCC researchers.

Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to taking part. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed, and formed the basis of the results and discussion sections of this report.

Participants

Friendly Call volunteers were recruited through the Friendly Call development worker Brenda Barry. Brenda Barry is a member of the SAFE project steering group.

Focus group participants were geographically and socially diverse. They were recruited through the Friendly Call Cork service and a wide variety of local community initiatives and groups in the relevant areas. These include but are not limited to the Lantern Project, local residents associations, local day centres run by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and community health initiatives. Every effort was made to recruit widely, and therefore capture data that was representative of all of Cork City.

Data analysis

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Two UCC researchers (TJ & K) conducted the data analysis with input from an experienced qualitative researcher (CS). Data were managed using Nvivo software. Each UCC researcher coded the interviews separately (to reduce bias) and identified themes and subthemes. Both researchers discussed their findings before deciding on the final version of results.

Ethics

The SAFE project received ethical approval from the SREC ethics committee based at the University College Cork. All data was anonymised and is stored under the guidelines of SREC and is in line with best practice for qualitative research.

Future use of the data

It is the intention of the researchers involved to publish academic papers using the data from this report.

RESULTS

Attitudes towards Cork City

The majority of the participants said they love living in Cork; it is perceived as a happy and enjoyable place, with little to no safety issues by daylight. In general, it feels safe to this population. There were many places described as "safe" in Cork, including community centres and anywhere during the day time.

A number of safety and security concerns were identified amongst the older population of Cork. The following themes are considered the key safety issues for older adults in Cork city:

- City infrastructure
- Public Services
- Crime /antisocial behaviours

City Infrastructure

Participants stated that certain poor infrastructure within the city creates physical difficulties and barriers for older adults navigating Cork City. In terms of accessibility to Cork City, conflicts with cycling/cyclists were of particular concern, and areas considered to be "unsafe" were highlighted.

> **Accessibility.**

Cracks in the footpaths, uneven surfaces, and dips in the road crossings are all creating potential hazards, especially for those using wheelchairs and walkers. Lack of proper lighting in some city and residential areas may also be contributing to feeling unsafe, especially at night and for those who are visually impaired.

"So the footpath goes down to ground level, now that's great for people in wheelchairs or for people who have to use walkers. I really think that the few places that they aren't and they come to a sudden stop. Personally if I don't have someone with me, I can't get down the step or I can't get up it. So at the end of footpaths, if there could be this little lip." P3 FG4, male.

> *"That little lip on the side of the road that is the same colour of the road. Why couldn't that little lip be painted either red or yellow or something? So that people with bad eyesight could actually see the blasted thing."* P4, FG1, female.

➤ Cycling

Cyclists on the footpaths are posing safety issues, especially for older people, who have reported speedy/reckless cycling that endanger them by increasing their risk for falls. Our participants feel that young, local cyclists give them no warning before getting dangerously close to where they are walking. Many felt that cyclists make them nervous and increase the difficulty of getting around town.

> *"I have raised it several times, with this friendly city thing, what's the position about cyclists on the footpath? I have been knocked down twice by cyclists who have come behind me. I was told, 'Get out of the effing way.'"* P1, FG3, male.

➤ Unsafe Areas.

Several "unsafe areas" were reported and identified as places where (perceived) excessive alcohol consumption, drugs, and/or crime are occurring. These areas include, but are not limited to, the following: Merchant's Quay (especially at night), Bishop Lucey Park, Capwell, near the bus office on Grand Parade, South Main Street, narrow streets in the city centre (Oliver Plunkett/Grand Parade area), the lanes near Tesco on Paul Street (perceived as being used for drugs), St. Fin Barre's area (especially involving students on weekends and during R&G Week), and parks, which can be unsafe at night and unsafe for pets (e.g. needles in pet paws).

> *"…if they were to take people off the dole and give them the position to man the park and I know that some of you might agree with me that us who grew up near a park that that was the only space we had and we wouldn't dare step out of line when the caretaker was there like. With the caretakers around the place it was run just perfectly."* P10, FG4, female.

Other respondents indicated they felt unsafe going into Churches, especially if no service was taking place or there was no congregation present. The grounds of Churches, especially at night or quite times of the day, some respondents felt fearful and isolated.

Public Services

While many positive comments were made on the public services available in Cork and utilised by the older population, several participants voiced concerns about services in the city such as transportation and the presence of An Garda Síochána .

➢ **Problems with transportation.**

While there was substantial praise of local bus drivers who reportedly go above and beyond to help older commuters, the bus service overall has left older people feeling vulnerable - mostly due to busses not coming by their stops at their scheduled times. Participants explained that this is a problem, especially in the winter, when they are left standing in the cold for long periods of time on their own. They also feel that bus schedules have been changing for the worse - catering to the working adult population's needs and not always cognisant of the needs of the older population. Some respondents stated because of these changes they no longer went into the city centre.

➢ **An Garda Síochána.**

Participants felt the presence of more Gardaí would increase their feelings of safety and security. Many described the Gardaí as short-staffed, unreachable, and simply not present/visible enough on the streets in the city. Several scenarios were also described where the geography of Cork was unknown to the Gardaí, contributing to a general feeling of

being unsupported and/or unsafe in time-sensitive and dangerous situations. According to some of the respondents there was a sense that Gardaí were unfamiliar with street names, local areas, and this was created a sense of lack of support. It was clear that older persons would feel safer if they could see Gardaí on the beat, and in uniform in their local areas, and having a greater depth of local knowledge.

> *"I mean, and in uniform. There's no use in saying that they're walking around. That doesn't give you the safety like seeing a guard in a uniform. They might be there, but if you don't see them, you think that if they came up to you, you would be afraid of them."* P9, FG1, female.

> *"Guards should be around, they're no use inside in barracks, and in uniform. You would feel safer. I think it would frighten the young lads, even if they're on drugs and things. They might be able to see that they're misbehaving, and take their names, and call on them, if they're given the correct name."* P12, FG4, male.

Crime/ Antisocial Behaviour

Many participants described negative experiences due to activity from large groups of people, unfriendly behaviours, and crime in Cork.

➤ **Group Activity.**

According to the focus groups, large groups of people can inspire fear and intimidation in the older population, especially when an older person faces them alone. Groups that were identified to pose safety concerns among participants include

- 'boisterous' young people,
- trespassers on personal property,
- large crowds on the street, and

- groups of men and/or women under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and/or begging.

Participants felt that a lot could be done to make young people more mindful of older people.

"I believe perhaps something could be done in schools, to remind youngsters that they won't always be young. That they too will be slower and that they should think about people coming against them."   P1, FG1, male.

➢ **Antisocial Behaviour**

Several situations were described where groups of people cause problems such as bin burning and trespassing on home property, especially at night. As a result, some participants feel it is unsafe to open their front doors, especially when it is dark and/or when they are in the house alone.

➢ **Crime**

Participants relayed personal stories of assaults and robberies in the focus group discussions; from home break-ins to knife attacks on the street, telephone scams and crime in the media (TV, radio, etc.). All of these factors are contributing to reasons why the older population in Cork feels unsafe.

➢ **Changes in behaviour**

Several respondents indicated that 'times had changed', and they no longer felt that it was safe to leave their doors unlocked during the day. Others said they had 'got CCTV' on their homes, to protect themselves and their property. Although several respondents said they did not want CCTV on their homes, they felt it had become a necessary part of modern life, and distinct from earlier times in the lives when they felt safer.

Underlying Themes

In addition to the main themes listed above, there were other themes that emerged within the focus groups that give insight into life as an older person in Cork. This included, but is not limited to, the following: support services, loneliness and isolation, and cultural perceptions.

> ### Support Services.

The Friendly Call service received very positive feedback within the focus groups and participants hope to see the service expanded nationally. It was described as "the best support" that brings joy to older people, especially those living at home alone. Community centre activities such as singing, dancing, and gardening were also praised. Participants felt that home help services are also positive, but insufficiently available.

"…So then I recommended that they join friendly call which they did. So the reason I say this is because it's such a simple yet brilliant thing for the elderly. Because I've been involved for so long I can honestly say it's the best thing I ever came across. The best thing. And I think it should be nationally supported." P4, FG2, male.

However, participants also felt that there needs to be more awareness of services that are already in place.

"So perhaps one of the recommendations, is to say, those who know about it, it's a great service but not everybody knows about it. So perhaps the city council, and cork county could perhaps highlight it a little bit more." P5, FG2, female.

> ### Loneliness and Isolation

For those with little support at home, some older people are afraid they will remain undiscovered after a fall or other health crisis situation. Loneliness may contribute to feelings of insecurity and fear. The presence of family support and individual personality are factors in

whether or not an older person might feel lonely or isolated. The general consensus was that home help visits are too short to help a person with feelings of loneliness and isolation.

> ➤ **Perceptions of different cultural groups**

Some participants outlined that it can be difficult to understand the customs of different cultures (including the Traveller Community). Several challenging scenarios were described in relation to interactions with other cultures. There was a perception among the participants that Irish/Cork natives are more friendly than those originally from other cultures. Although some of these perceptions were unfounded in experience, fear of 'others' is not uncommon, and must be considered a fear of the unknown, rather than simply fear of people from different cultural groups.

"They're getting on the buses, and they have a few front seats available for us old people, and I carry groceries, and I can't go to the back. But they're taking over. What concerns me is, they can't speak English, they're extremely aggressive, and they look at you, and I get frightened." P5, FG3, female.

"People in Cork are friendly. If you go somewhere else in the world, you will see other cultures aren't as friendly as we are." P9, FG1, male.

DISCUSSION

Cork City, has a slightly higher percentage of people in each age cohort group over the age of 65 when compared to the national average. In general, the older persons which took part in this scoping study are very happy to live in Cork City, however, there are several key areas which need to addressed and actions taken to improve older person's perception and experience of safety in Cork City. Feeling unsafe is a common and demonstrable social phenomenon, irrespective of social and gender difference. Feeling unsafe is a difficult term to concretely define, however, it can be based on real experiences, and perceptions of others, fear of fear, and perhaps most importantly based on the findings in this study, older persons feel less safe at night-time. It is clear from this scoping study that older persons in Cork City, moderate their activities, and therefore their interactions with others, based on the time of day, and natural light. Obviously this presents problems, not all of which can be mitigated.

However, placing the overall findings of this study within the larger frame of understanding the relationship between older populations and the changing urban environment, and the need to develop supportive inclusive urban communities are central issues to public policy [6]. It is important for policy makers to consider how shared urban spaces and streets can be truly inclusive and liveable for older adults, regardless of the time of day.

Feeling unsafe is a perception and can often lack a basis in experience or reality of a posed threat to older person's safety, for example perceived anti-social behaviour, could be just harmless teenagers 'hanging out'. However, the salient point from this report is that people feel unsafe, because of lack of support from services, difficulty accessing transport, changes in urban space mainly footpaths, and the presence of cyclists. This is why the recommendations from this report may have a significant impact on the perceptions of older persons living in Cork City, and feeling unsafe.

Groups of teenagers form large groups with their peers and are not always aware of the impact they have on others in their vicinity. On the whole they are not threatening although they can be quite boisterous. Engaging the youth in activities with our older residents may go some way to help teenagers understand the negative impact their groups and noise have on our elderly population. This could serve to develop an understanding among older adults that

teenagers congregating is a normal discourse for this population group and does not always pose a threat to passers-by. This could also have a knock-on effect on older person's perception that night-time is more unsafe. Equally, the multicultural society that makes Cork such a vibrant city can be a big change for many of the older generation. People speaking in different languages or even with different accents can be strange and frightening for those who have limited exposure to other cultures and who are not culturally aware. Encouraging multicultural events with a particular slant towards involving the older generation may help to break down the barriers and begin a process of understanding and of appreciating differences between cultures and reducing the sense of fear. Working with interested groups, for example the Cork Cycle Campaign, may bring about reduced feelings of being unsafe while in the city centre for older persons, through a greater understanding of the needs of all users of the city centre. Although intricately linked to feelings of being unsafe; isolation, social and emotional loneliness, are threads within this report but also beyond the scope of the report. Loneliness is a significant factor in feeling unsafe, modern society demands so much from the working population there is sometimes very little time for families to meet up and spend time with their elderly relatives. The work done by support groups, either over the phone or community centres, can offer some relief from the burden of social and emotional loneliness and isolation.

Within this report there are dualisms; old/young, Irish/non-Irish, private/public etc. These dualisms may lead the reader to conclude that older persons are passive recipients of feelings of being unsafe, and ultimately it is someone else's fault, and therefore someone else's responsibility to change and lessen their fears. Such dualism are a fallacy- young people can be both threatening and threatened, and people can feel equally fearful in their private home as they do in public spaces. Within the framework of positive aging, there is recognition that older persons must take an active role in participatory engagement with interested groups and supportive services. In order for the recommendations to be successful, and bring about meaningful change, older persons must be given the time and space to engage with interested groups.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are based on the findings as presented in the report and meetings with the steering group. It was not feasible to include potential partners to bring these recommendations to fruition, and which groups or personnel should lead on these recommendations. However, it is clear that for actions to be taken on these recommendations input will be needed from multiple agencies, that may or may not have a direct interest in the care for older persons in Cork City.

NO.	RECOMMENDATION	RATIONALE
Overall Attitudes towards Cork		
1.	Celebrate and highlight living in Cork through a story telling installation about living in Cork	The majority of the participants said they love living in Cork; it is perceived as a happy and enjoyable place.
Issues with city infrastructure		
2.	Accessibility Audit of Cork City Centre	Older people identified physical infrastructure that presents a barrier to accessing the city centre
3.	Daytime event for older people in Bishop Lucey park.	Older people felt that city centre and parks are unsafe.
4.	Improve painting on footpaths/lips on the street to help visually impaired individuals to see better.	The older population is facing poor infrastructure within the city, creating physical difficulties when navigating through Cork.

5.	Improve infrastructure to separate footpaths from cycle lanes (e.g. plastic wands).	See above.
6.	Organise a Cork Cycling Awareness campaign to increase cyclists awareness of older people and reduce the number of cyclists on footpaths.	Cyclists on the footpaths are posing safety issues, especially for older people, who have reported speedy/reckless cycling that endanger them by increasing their risk for falls.
Public Services		
7.	Organise an Older Persons event on culture night with transportation included.	Recent changes to bus services have left older people feeling vulnerable.
8.	Explore with An Garda Síochána how they could be more visible to the public.	Participants felt that Gardai were not present/visible enough on the streets in the city.
9.	In the event that there is a change in community policing structure- Allocate Gardaí to specific areas in an attempt to familiarise them with the geography of that area.	Several scenarios were described where the geography of Cork was unknown to the Gardaí

Negative Experiences/ Antisocial Behaviours		
10.	Pilot an intergenerational project in secondary schools that are based in areas that have a high proportion of older people.	Young cyclists give them no warning before getting dangerously close to them on the footpaths. Older people feel intimidated when they face groups of young people.
11.	Encourage the people of Cork to be a friendly neighbour.	Several situations were described where participants felt unsafe in their own homes, afraid to open the front door.
12.	Explore the idea of a social prescribing style model inclusive of older adults	Many participants described negative experiences due to activity from large groups of people, unfriendly behaviours, and crime in Cork.
Underlying themes		
13.	Increase older people's exposure to different cultures by arranging for Friendly Call to recruit international volunteers with input from the City of Sanctuary.	People from other cultures perceived by older people to be unreasonable to work with. Perception that Irish/Cork natives are more friendly than those from other nations. Friendly call service received very positive feedback within the focus groups. Described as the 'best support'.
14.	Organise a 'Cultural Awareness' training or event for older people e.g. A Tea Dance.	Some participants felt that it can be difficult to understand the customs of different cultures.

15.	Organise a 'Diversity Day' to develop a great understanding among older adults of the Traveller community and culture.	Several challenging scenarios and perception were described indicating that older people were fearful of the Traveller community.
16.	Organise an *expo* of services for community groups to highlight the range of free services available to older people in Cork. Provide transportation to/from the expo for older people.	Participants felt that there needs to be more awareness of services that are already in place.
17.	Expand the 'Friendly Call' service.	For those with little support at home, some older people are afraid they will remain undiscovered after a fall or other health crisis situation. Friendly call service received extremely positive feedback amongst participants.

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APPENDIX

Topic Guide for Focus Groups

Warm-up
What is it like living in Cork City as an older person?
What does safety mean to you? What does security mean to you?
Do you think Cork is a safe place to live?
Do you like living in Cork city?
Safe/Unsafe
What areas feel safe? What areas feel unsafe?
Are there any areas you avoid? Why?
Is there a difference between being out during the day and during the evening or night?
Who do you feel safe with? Is there anyone that makes you feel unsafe?
Experiences
Have you ever experiences negative behaviour towards you as an older person?
Have you been in a situation that made you feel unsafe?
Have you heard of someone else that has been in a situation that made them feel unsafe? How do that make you feel?
Environment
What about places like day care centres and hospitals? What are they like for an older person?
What about banks and shops? What are they like for an older person?
What about when you are walking around? What is that like for an older person? Do you feel safe?
Are there facilities and supports in the city that make you feel safe? Is there a need for more of these?
What about things like footpaths, street lighting, traffic lights? Are these easy to use for an older person?
Social
Where do you meet people in your community?

Do you think isolation is a problem for older people?
Have you ever seen/heard something in the news that has made you concerned for your safety?
Who do you feel safe? Is there anyone that makes you feel unsafe?
Financial
Do you think older people are worried about money? Why? Does this make them feel unsafe?
Cool-down
Has the city changed throughout the years? In what way?
Do you think it is safer now than before?
Is there anything else you would like to discuss?