

International Reminiscence and Life Review Conference 2009
Pre-Conference Intensive (9:00 AM - Noon)

Symposium: Life-review innovations in the Netherlands

Description

At this symposium two recently developed cost-effective life-review interventions for older adults with mild depressive symptomatology will be presented: 'Looking for meaning in life' and 'The stories we live by'. Both interventions can be applied by psychologists and nurses with experience in counselling and therapy with older adults.

First a review and meta-analysis of current developments in reminiscence and life-review and a model for applying life-review will be presented.

'Looking for meaning in life' is a life-review course aimed at people aged over 55 with depressive symptoms. The course consists of twelve meetings in which the following topics are dealt with: one's own name, smells from the past, houses you lived in, hands (work), friendship, life thread and turning points, attitude to life and meaningfulness, desires and identity. Sensory recall exercises, creative expression and group discussions take turns at each meeting. Session 4, 8, and 11 are based upon problem solving therapy in order to enhance mastery and agency in the present lives of the participants. Looking for meaning in life is now implemented in 80% of the mental health care institutes in the Netherlands. The program has been adapted for older adults living in psychiatric hospitals in order to enhance life-satisfaction. The program is currently adapted for nursing home residents. The program will be interactively introduced. Then the results of a randomized controlled trial (n=180) of the effects on depression, meaning in life, reminiscence functions and economic profit will be discussed.

After the break 'The stories we live by' will be introduced. It consists of eight sessions with 4 to 6 people of 55 years and older having mild to moderate depressive symptoms. Each session has a different topic: youth and family, work and care, love and friendship, difficult times, life as a book with chapters, metaphors, meaning in life, the near future. Participants are given questions about these topics that they have to answer at home. One question is elaborately discussed in a group session. As it can be expected on the basis of their depression that many stories will be 'problem-saturated', the counsellor will actively use questions from a narrative therapeutic framework to assist a process of reconstruction of stories with an agentic plot. The participants of the workshop will try some of these questions. The program has also been adapted for immigrants in the Netherlands. After the experiential introduction of the program, the results of studies on the effects of this program will be discussed.

In the last part of the workshop the current development towards online selfhelp life-review will be introduced and the participants are invited to reflect and discuss on the possibilities of life-review as online selfhelp.

Presenters:



Ernst Bohlmeijer (PhD). Ernst is a psychologist and works as an associate professor in clinical health psychology at the Twente University. He doctorated in 2007 on reminiscence and late-life depression. In the last 5 years he was involved in the development of 7 life-review interventions and effectiveness studies in the Netherlands. Together with Gerben Westerhof he edited a book on the meaning and use of life-stories that is used as a handbook in education and clinical practice.



(Sage, 2007).

Gerben Westerhof (PhD) is a psychogerontologist and works as associate professor in clinical health psychology at the University of Twente. He has published widely on the topics of mental health, well-being, meaning in life, and identity development in later life. He is particularly interested in the importance of life stories and reminiscence in promoting mental health. Gerben has been the co-editor of “Ageing in society: European perspectives on gerontology”



Jojanneke Korte (MSc) graduated October 2007 as a psychologist at the University of Twente. Since January 2007 she works as a PhD student in clinical health psychology at the Twente University. Her PhD project is focused on a newly developed life-review intervention, “The stories we live by”.