

Solo Ageing - Challenges and Triumphs in a Graying World

Hello PIONeers,

Welcome all PIONeers and new members to Pass It On Network's online 50/50 conversations. We take pride in our global community of PIONeers in over 65 countries, collectively addressing critical issues facing older adults everywhere. Thank you for joining us in this ongoing dialogue and let's continue to "pass on" the torch of knowledge, experience, and resilience to pave the way for a brighter and more inclusive tomorrow for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

July's topic – ***Solo Ageing: Challenges and Triumphs in a Graying World*** – drew participants from 14 countries. Clearly, the following question is at the forefront of many minds.

Older Adults Everywhere Are Asking: "Who will take care of me when I'm really old?"

In collectivistic cultures, taking care of elderly family members is a strong expectation. For example, multigenerational households are common in parts of Asia, and adult children are expected to live with or near their parents and help them as they age.

And then there's the solo ager. It refers to someone who ages without the support of family members.

This term does not have a direct translation in most other languages, yet. Many countries might use terms that focus on the social isolation aspect of solo ageing and not necessarily as it applies to older adults.

PION has conducted an [informal survey](#) among our global PIONeers and reached the same conclusion.

But, as solo ageing becomes a more recognized issue around the world, new terms are likely to emerge to capture the specific needs of this population.

Beyond social isolation, solo agers face a unique set of challenges. For example: Financial security, Physical and mental health, decision-making and advocacy, emotional well-being, housing and personal safety. These challenges may be different depending on your age, social connections, personal resilience, and even their gender (women tend to live longer and be solo longer).

And so, to help us understand these unique considerations and develop better support systems and resources for solo agers, we

invited [Sara Zeff Geber, PhD](#), who coined the term Solo Ager and is the foremost authority on the subject.

How Is Solo Ageing Different?

Combined with the 1960s introduction of the birth control pill, many women opted to exercise more personal and professional freedom not previously available for them. The 20% of that generation who do not have children are now in age 60 and forward. They are part of a growing number of older adults, both women and men, who do not have familial support due to these and other reasons.

People with children and grandchildren, for the most part, have been able to garner the support of their family when it becomes too difficult to self-advocate and manage their daily well-being.

It is not the case for solo agers who have had to develop strategies to mitigate some of the risk of not having the close support of family members. For example, building a network of peers, opt for home-sharing, use paid professional support, or move to some form of retirement community.

Even those who have had a robust network of same-age friends were discovering that they all needed support at roughly the same time, or were called to support aging parents.

The Future Can Be More Sustainable with Intergenerational Relationships

With the global trend of people living longer, intergenerational relationships are becoming more important. If retirement communities used to segregate older adults, now they are encouraging active intergenerational life.

And not only there. There are self-organized local communities, faith organizations, and others, that promote intergenerational learning and support networks for healthy ageing.

While these developments are encouraging, it's crucial to maintain a realistic perspective on ageing. This brings us to an important point:

Stop Magical Thinking

If you believe that you are going to live healthfully and happily until you suddenly die peacefully, at 95, in your sleep, after a fabulous day with the people you love - that's magical thinking.

When it comes to your own ageing there are things you can do to stretch the independent period of your later life. Eventually, we all get to a point where we need additional support. If you are a Solo ager, or a potential one, you should consider this reality, both certain and uncertain aspects of it when planning for your own future.

PIONeers' Insights

Our PIONeers shared valuable insights during our discussion. These perspectives highlight the diverse challenges and potential solutions for solo agers across different cultures and contexts:

- Providing only physical needs without compassionate and emotional connection is abusive and dehumanizing.
- A few PIONeers noted that men are mostly absent from workshops and other gatherings and wondered why. What might be a way to encourage more men to come to supportive spaces? Sara mentioned [Jackson Rainer](#) who writes and speaks about men solo agers.
- Time and again we heard about starting to think and plan early. It's never too early. This is where intergenerational connections shine. (**jump to 01:18:00' in the [session's recording](#)**).

In conclusion, solo ageing presents unique challenges that require thoughtful planning and community support. From building intergenerational relationships to addressing financial security and emotional well-being, solo agers can take proactive steps to ensure a fulfilling later life. As our global population ages, it's crucial that we continue to develop resources, support systems, and policies that address the specific needs of solo agers, promoting dignity, independence, and quality of life for all older adults.

If you want to continue discussing these topics and explore other ways to connect and make a positive impact, [this link](#) leads to a spreadsheet where you may post your topic of advocacy interest and your contact, as well as see what others are interested in.

Moira Allan, moira@passitonnetwork.org
Co-Founder & International Coordinator
Pass It On Network
4, rue Amélie
Paris France 75007
France