The purpose of this study was to analyse images of the elderly as manifested in elderly care within Finland’s social welfare and health system over a period covering almost 150 years. The study also aimed to analyse how medicalisation has influenced the shaping of elderly care. The study based its image of the elderly on three elements: characteristics, assistance needs and ways of meeting such needs.

The empirical material for the study consisted of committee reports relating to elderly care and elderly policy, laws and decrees, government proposals, cabinet committees’ reports and circulars concerning the enactment and application of these and national plans for the organisation of social welfare and health care. Material was also drawn from studies on old-age and ageing, from social history studies and from statistics in the area of services for the elderly.

The study employed a two-phase approach to interpreting the image of the elderly. In the first phase, the materials were used as a basis for general categorisations of characteristics and assistance needs. In the second phase, the shaping of the image was interpreted by means of external concepts: How are the characteristics, assistance needs and services to be placed within the dimensions of ‘capacity’, ‘skills’ and ‘willingness’?

The findings indicated that great changes occurred in the characteristics associated with old people. There was a change from indigence to financial well-being, from work incapacity to physical capability, and from illness to ‘multi-disease’ functionality in the image of the elderly. With regard to psychosocial elements, a fragmented image emerged. The study also indicated that there was more continuity than change in elderly people’s assistance needs. According to findings, there has never been only one image of old age in elderly care; rather, there have been several at the same time. They have persisted for quite some time after their formation.

The medicalisation of old age began fairly late, but it has proceeded quite rapidly over the last 50 years. The main reasons for this increased medicalisation are associated with an emphasis on preventive social policy, with the WHO’s definition of health and with a belief in the potential of medicine. The closer we moved towards the present, the more prominently social control featured in the materials. In the field of elderly care, it is difficult to distinguish between social support and social control.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord-Keywords
old age - medicalisation
images of the elderly - elderly policy
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Säilytyspaikka-Förvaringsställe-Where deposited

Muita tietoja-Övriga uppgifter-Additional information