Shelter from the Storm:

Sense of Purpose and Belonging in Men's Sheds in Ireland

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine if there was a sense of purpose achieved by males who attend the Men's Shed in Ireland, and if these members feel a sense of belonging being part of the Men's Shed. The goal of the research was to explore the importance the Men's Shed plays in their lives, in areas such as belonging to a group, contributing to the community, completing different projects, and their overall well-being. Qualitative research was conducted using a sample of 5 participants who described their experiences of the Men's Shed in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and then analysed using thematic analysis. Six themes emerged from the dataset along with various sub-themes. The study found positive experiences of members in the Men's Shed and analysis illustrated that interaction and socialisation are necessary for men throughout their lifetime and can have a major impact on their physical and mental health.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether males who attend the Men's Shed in Ireland feel a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging by attending the non-profit organisation. The Irish Men's Sheds Association (2013) state that a Men's Shed is a dedicated, friendly and welcoming meeting place in the community where men come together and undertake mutually agreed activities. Since 2011 when the Irish Men's Shed Association was first formed, momentum has gathered, and various Men's Sheds throughout Ireland have featured in different media platforms spreading awareness of this new and expanding community organisation. Golding (2015) states, the core motto of the Men's Shed is "Men don't talk face to face; they talk shoulder to shoulder". This sentence often resonates with men of different backgrounds.

1.1 Sense of Purpose and Belonging

According to Nygren et al. (2005), purpose in life as a concept originated from humanistic psychology and is based on Frankl's (1963) concept 'will to meaning'. Frankl (1963) described the 'will to meaning' as a main motivational force. He stated that any frustration with this motivational force will lead to feelings of emptiness. Rappaport, Fossler, Bross and Gilden (1993) found a positive correlation between purpose in life and a positive view of the future. Bonebright, Clay and Akenmann (2000) state that purpose is highly beneficial to an individual's overall well-being. Absence of a sense of purpose in life is often linked to mental health problems. As regards sense of belonging, belonging is one of the basic needs in Maslow's Hierarchy. Kissane and McLaren (2006) looked at sense of belonging as a predictor of reasons for living in older adults. Their results illustrated that a higher sense of belonging predicted more reasons to live overall. Active interaction and involvement with others produces a sense of belonging, which is a key factor in well-being. Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema and Collier (1992) stated that a sense of

belonging is defined as the experience of personal involvement in an environment or group so that an individual feels part of that environment or group. Bailey and McLaren (2005) concluded that a sense of belonging needs to be facilitated in order for mental health to improve. A failure to develop a sense of belonging has been linked to negative health outcomes such as depression.

1.2 Mental Health

These negative health outcomes are often associated with Irish men. The Irish Men's Shed Association (2016) outlines how most Irish men don't discuss their feelings. Unlike women, most men are often hesitant to talk about their emotions and due to this, many men suffer more from depression, isolation and loneliness. Halpin (2018) stated how the 2016 census found that the 65 and over age group had the largest increase in population since 2011, rising by 102,174 to 637,567, a rise of 19.1%. Over half a million in this older age group lived in private households, an increase of 19.6%. O Luanaigh and Lawlor (2008) highlight that loneliness is most common in older people and is associated with adverse health consequences from a mental and physical health perspective. From a mental health point of view, this is evident in the national annual suicide reports. According to the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) Annual Report for 2016, there were 399 suicides in 2016 with over 80% of these accounting for males alone. The highest proportions of deaths by suicide in Ireland are now men aged 45 to 54. Becoming a member of a community such as the Men's Shed offers a safe and busy environment with an atmosphere of friendship where men can talk. Men tend to ignore their problems and therefore have been ignored by both the health system and modern society. "It's time for a change and the Men's Shed movement is a powerful tool in helping men to once again become valued and valuable members of our community" (Irish Men's Sheds Association, 2016).

1.3 Men's Sheds

The Men's Shed was originally founded in Australia in the 1990's and since then has grown rapidly across the globe. In February 2012, at a national consultation with the Shedders Association Ireland, a set of values were created which were adopted and undertaken to represent all the work the different Men's Sheds carry out throughout the country. These values include honesty and openness, equality and inclusion, and leadership. The Irish Men's Shed Association (2016) state how their work creates places of belonging, mutual respect, participatory democracy, companionship, and community for all Shedders. Men's Sheds offer support and a place to belong. Carragher and Golding (2015) state how each shed tends to have an area for woodworking tools and equipment, and a social space for members to enjoy a chat and a cup of tea. Men's Sheds are open to all men regardless of age, background or ability. It is a place where men can share their skills and knowledge with others, learn new skills and develop existing skills. The main goal is to give men the opportunity to improve and maintain their health and well-being, both physically and mentally. In 2000, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised the need to pay greater attention to the shorter life expectancy of men. They also identified the lack of understanding the role 'masculinity' plays in shaping men's expectations and behaviours as a primary cause for the health inconsistency between men and women (WHO, 2000).

1.4 Australian and Canadian Studies

As the Men's Shed originated in Australia, the majority of research has been conducted on an Australian sample. Research carried out around the globe states that when men grow older, many of them can begin to suffer from loneliness, isolation and depression. Statistics show that men suffer from these issues in greater proportion than women. Evans, Frank, Oliffe and Gregory (2011) stated that men in the later years of their lives are faced with complexities regarding their masculinity. The transition from career and work life to

retirement can be difficult and stressful, especially when unplanned. Waling and Fildes (2016) conducted a study on improving the health and well-being outcomes for men who attend Men's Sheds in inner-regional Australia. They carried out 22 surveys and 20 interviews with the men who participated in the programme. A limitation to the study was the language barrier between the researcher and the participants. The researcher spoke English, while participants spoke Aboriginal. This breakdown in communication may have had an effect on the analysis of the data. The current study will not have this issue as the interviewer and participants both speak English. Waling and Fildes (2016) results found that 95% of men were satisfied with the running of the programme which encouraged help-seeking behaviour and as a result improved the health and well-being outcomes for the men who attended. From a qualitative side, while there were areas that were identified for improvement, most men reported that they were content with the format and would not like to see major changes to its implementation. The results of this research confirmed the known benefits of programmes such as the Men's Shed.

Culph, Wilson, Cordier and Stanliffe (2015) looked at the experience of depression in older Australian men. Their study involved in-depth interviews and administration of the Beck Depression Inventory-II with 12 men. The interviews looked at how participation in the Men's Shed, living in a regional area, and retirement, overlapped with experiences of depression. They found that participation at the Men's Shed decreased self-reported symptoms of depression. The activity and social focus in the Men's Shed helped men to rediscover a sense of purpose and a sense of self. Participants also reported feelings of achievement and pride, which had a positive influence on their sense of self-worth.

Another Australian study conducted by Fildes, Cass, Wallner and Owen (2010) looked at the type of outcomes for men's health and well-being that can be achieved and measured through their participation in Men's Sheds. A Participatory Action Research (PAR)

process was used, including numerous data collection tools to examine the project processes and outcomes. They discovered that because of their involvement in the project, the men increased their sense of purpose, self-worth and self-confidence. They also widened their social networks and increased their skill levels.

Ford, Scholz and Lu (2015) drew on the social identity theory in their Australian study to examine the extent to which membership in Men's Sheds can influence the quality of life of the members. They surveyed 322 Men's Shed users in Australia on four quality of life domains and their willingness to accept health advice offered at the shed. They found that social identity was a significant predictor of physical health, psychological, and social relationships, as well as willingness to take health advice. These insights may be useful for future research and for the promotion of men's willingness to engage with health information and practice. A limitation to the study was that the sample used may not have been representative of the Men's Sheds population. Future research could re-examine this issue in another national setting or community context. The current study is on an Irish sample so will address this limitation. There was also a lack of research from a qualitative perspective. The current study will use qualitative research to achieve in-depth analysis.

As the concept of the Men's Shed is relatively new and upcoming in Canada, there has been limited research conducted in comparison to Australia, however, Reynolds (2011) looked at older male adults' involvement and experience in Men's Sheds in Canada. In-depth interviews with 12 participants were conducted. The results showed that Men's Sheds promote healthy living by increasing opportunities for successful aging through various social engagements and decreased levels of loneliness and social isolation. Men's Sheds may help tackle a number of mental health problems and help increase an interest in promoting positive mental health. A limitation to the study was the division of the Men's Shed into two

separate Men's Sheds during the study. This proved difficult for the researcher to balance the sample. The current study will focus on one Men's Shed and therefore will not face this issue.

1.5 European Studies

Building on Australian and Canadian research, Milligan, Payne, Bingley and Cockshott (2015) outlined how one in five of the British population is an older man, many living on their own. Due to a lack of regular contact and socialisation, loneliness and social isolation regularly develops in older men. Poor physical health such as high blood pressure, and poor mental health including depression and suicide are common side effects of this loneliness and social isolation. They ran a pilot study in the United Kingdom to illustrate how common spaces in local communities can be used to promote and maintain the health and well-being of older men. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used to gather data from 62 participants from three different sheds. They found that sheds do represent gendered landscapes in which older men can perform and reaffirm their masculinity, and that Men's Sheds hold real potential for the maintenance of the health and well-being of their members. They found that by taking this view on masculinity, older men were more engaged and improved their health-seeking behaviours. Milligan et al. (2015) reviewed 31 research articles aimed to assess evidence for the effects of Men's Sheds and other gendered social activities on the health and well-being of older men. Qualitative data was evident throughout many of the research articles, providing valuable insights into why complex psychosocial activities can impact individuals. The review found some evidence that Men's Sheds and other gendered social activities may have an effect on the mental health and well-being of older men.

As the Men's Shed was formed in Ireland in 2011, research conducted on an Irish sample is quite limited compared to Australian studies. Carragher (2013) conducted her study on an Irish sample. She explored the learning that takes place by older men in community

Men's Sheds in Ireland. A total of 445 questionnaires were distributed to 52 sheds across the country. Overall, 30 of the 52 sheds responded with a total of 347 questionnaires. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data including questionnaires and five in-depth focus group interviews. The focus groups gave participants the opportunity to talk about what happens in the sheds and what they get out of participation. The study concluded that Men's Sheds are an important part to men's learning and can also provide the context for future targeted interventions to improve their quality of life. Carragher and Golding (2015) also looked at the impact of community-based Men's Sheds on informal and non-formal learning by older men in Ireland. All registered Men's Sheds in Ireland were invited to take part in the mixed methods study. Questionnaires and focus groups were used to gather data. They concluded that Men's Sheds provide space for practical learning that adds value to the lives and experiences of men beyond or outside of work, giving them a drive to continue learning. They also discovered that conversations that take place within the Men's Shed have an important role in helping older men cope with difficult transitions in their lives.

1.6 Rationale for Study

Although there has been extensive recent research conducted on the Men's Shed, this research has been mainly conducted on an Australian sample. Any Irish research carried out on the Men's Shed was conducted by Carragher (2013) and Carragher and Golding (2015) looking at men and learning. No previous Irish studies have looked at sense of purpose or sense of belonging in Men's Shed members. The majority of previous research conducted has been quantitative in nature. The current study will take a qualitative approach running in-depth interviews. A qualitative approach allows participants to express their feelings and beliefs about a certain issue, in a personal and natural setting, saying as much or as little as they wish. Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest and Namey (2005) state that qualitative

research tries to understand a specific research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. This is the most appropriate method to use on the current sample.

1.7 Research Aims

The current study aims to examine; is there a sense of purpose achieved by males who attend the Men's Shed in Ireland? Do members feel a sense of belonging being part of the Men's Shed? The goal of the research is to explore the importance the Men's Shed plays in their lives, in areas such as belonging to a group, contributing to the community, completing different projects, and their overall well-being. The benefits of running this study not only include raising awareness for the Irish public about the positive effects the Men's Shed can have on the male population, but it may also lead to more men joining different Men's Sheds across the country as a result.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Participants were a convenient sample of five men who attended a particular Men's Shed in Leinster, Ireland. The researcher visited the Men's Shed and spoke with the Chairperson about the nature of the study. Once access to the sample was granted, participants were invited to take part in the study if they wished. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and participants were informed they could withdraw from the study at any point throughout the interview. All five participants completed the full interview. Interviews took place within the Men's Shed. Participants ranged in age (Mean=67.6) from 54 to 80 and were all retired males. All five participants completed second level education. One participant completed third level education. All five participants attended the Men's Shed at least once a week.

2.2 Design

To gain a detailed understanding, a qualitative design involving purposive sampling was used in the study. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather focused and textual data. The interviews allowed the participants to talk freely about their own experiences in the Men's Shed and allowed the researcher to answer the research questions. Purposive sampling was employed as the participants were of specific interest to the research study. Purposive sampling is very common in qualitative research. They key variables of interest relating to the qualitative research question were considered by the researcher in designing the interview questions. These included sense of purpose and sense of belonging aimed at men who attend the Men's Shed.

2.3 Materials/Apparatus/Interviews

2.3.1 Materials

Before commencing the interview, participants were given detailed information sheets regarding the study (See Appendix A). Information sheets also contained sample questions that could be asked in the interview. After these were read and any questions answered by the researcher, consent forms were distributed to fill out (See Appendix B). Debriefing sheets were handed to the participants once the interview had ended and the appropriate information and support services provided if the interview raised any negative feelings (See Appendix C). Other materials included a pen and paper for the researcher to take down notes during the interview and for participants to sign the consent forms.

2.3.2 Apparatus

A HP laptop was firstly used to prepare the information sheets, consent forms, interview questions and debriefing forms. A printer was used to print these forms into hard copies. Interviews were recorded using a dictaphone which was tested prior to commencing the interviews. A mobile phone was also kept nearby for recording purposes in case the dictaphone stalled during the interview. A jug of water and glasses were also provided for participants. The data was analysed using NVivo 11 Software to conduct thematic analysis. The transcribed interviews were stored locally on a computer hard disc on a secure laptop. After one year, these will be removed by the programme 'Eraser' (https://eraser.heidi.ie/). This programme physically removes the data from the disc. Participants were informed how this data will be stored and destroyed.

2.3.3 Interviews

Doody and Noonan (2013) outline how the most frequently used interview style for qualitative research is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible then structured interviews. They allow questions to be altered slightly depending on

the participant's answers which was crucial in this particular study. The interview consisted of 14 questions overall, two closed-ended questions and 12 open-ended questions (See Appendix D). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to use their own words. The interview commenced with the two closed-ended, demographic questions regarding age and employment status. This eased the participants into the interview. All questions were worded very carefully in a way participants could understand and interpret the information quite easily. Questions were developed from past research articles on sense of purpose, sense of belonging and the Men's Shed, such as Carragher (2013). The focus group questions were adapted from this study and adjusted accordingly to suit the research questions of the current study. These questions were then expanded and designed to explore the participants' experiences and feelings about attending the Men's Shed. The interview also contained various probing and unplanned probing questions for the researcher to achieve a further insight into the role the Men's Shed plays in their lives. Additional questions were added depending on the answers given by the participants.

2.4 Procedure

A research proposal outlining the aims of the study was submitted to Dublin Business School Ethics Board in October 2017. Once this was approved, contact was made with the Chairman of the particular Men's Shed in Leinster and access was granted to conduct the study. The letter of access cannot be included in the appendices as this includes personal information regarding the Chairman of the Men's Shed. Participants were then approached as a group at the Men's Shed by the researcher and asked to take part in the study. The title of the study was not disclosed to the participants at this stage. The full nature of the study could not be outlined to the participant until after the interview, as this could cause some bias in the results. The participants were told the study was investigating the role the Men's Shed plays in their lives. Participants were reassured that participation was completely voluntary and

confidential. Over the course of two days, one-to-one, semi-structured, 20-30 minutes, interviews took place in an unoccupied room in the Men's Shed. On each occasion, information sheets were given to the five participants who agreed to take part in the study prior to the interview. The researcher answered any questions that were raised. Consent forms were then signed by participants, the dictaphone was switched on and the interview commenced as per the interview schedule. Time was allowed for pauses throughout the interview to make the participant feel comfortable and think deeply about what they were verbalising. Once the interview terminated, the researcher thanked the participant for taking part and a debriefing sheet was distributed to the participant. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

2.5 Ethics

Prior to conducting the study, a research proposal was submitted and approved by DBS Research Ethics Committee. Ethical guidelines such as the DBS Ethical Guidelines for Research with Human Participants and the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI, 2011) guidelines were read and made familiar with.

Participants were informed that participation was completely voluntary and they were not obliged to take part. Participation was anonymous and confidential and they could withdraw at any stage throughout the interview process. Participants were told that the data collected would be anonymised by transcribing the recorded interview into electronic format where it would be stored securely on a password protected computer. Quotes from participants would be presented but these would also be anonymised. Each participant was given an ID number to ensure that transcriptions were not identifiable. If any quotes taken from the transcriptions were potentially identifiable, the quotes would not be quoted directly in the published study.

A debriefing sheet was given to all participants when the interviews terminated due to the slight use of deception regarding the title of study. Verbal and written information outlining the title and aims of the study were given to the participants. Contact details of the researcher were provided if they had any further questions about the study, and various support services were listed to provide help and support if needed.

2.6 Thematic Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, thematic analysis using NVivo 11 was used to analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is considered an accessible and flexible technique to create themes. It identifies, analyses and reports on themes and patterns in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 81- 86), "there are six decisions to consider prior to conducting thematic analysis";

(i) What counts as a theme?

(ii) A rich description of dataset or a detailed account of one particular aspect?

(iii) Inductive versus deductive thematic analysis?

(iv) Semantic or latent themes?

(v) Epistemology: essentialist/realist versus constructionist thematic analysis?

(vi) Overall question?

The correct form of thematic analysis can vary based on these six decisions, therefore it was important to make these decisions beforehand and review them throughout the process of conducting thematic analysis. In this study, themes were identified and analysed based on their prevalence and relevance to the research questions. Themes that were identified were from a rich description of the dataset and reflected the entire dataset. This was very useful as the researcher got participants views on this relatively new organisation in Ireland. Themes

were identified using an inductive manner that was data driven and participant driven. The data was coded without fitting it to any pre-existing codes. The research questions evolved out of this coding process. Themes selected from the data were identified using a semantic approach based on the participant's exact responses which provided a comprehensive description of the dataset. Thematic analysis was carried out within a realist/essentialist model. These reported on the participants' reality, experiences and meanings through language used in the dataset. Language helps the participant express these experiences and meanings. The overall research question enabled a realist, inductive, semantic analysis of the data. The interview questions did not lead directly to the questions that guided coding and analysis of the data, but instead informed the overall research question.

3. Results

3.1 Thematic Analysis

The study used thematic analysis to gather rich, in-depth data from the five semi-structured interviews conducted. Thematic analysis identified, analysed and reported patterns within the data. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis involves six essential steps. These include; familiarising oneself with the data, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing these themes and refining these themes, defining these themes and naming these themes, and finally, producing a report on the themes supporting them with quotes.

Initially, the interviews were transcribed first-hand by the researcher which aided with familiarisation with the data. The researcher then read and re-read the interview transcriptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline how the time spent in transcription informs the early stages of analysis, and a far more thorough understanding of the data will be developed having transcribed it. It is a valuable process. After transcribing the interviews, initial codes were created systematically using NVivo 11 software. The entire dataset was given equal attention and time. Features of the data that were relevant and interesting were identified and then coded.

When codes were created and finalised for the entire dataset, these were then organised into potential themes with supporting data extracts. Codes were combined together to form broader themes and these codes were then categorised into each theme. Sub-themes were created based on the relevant codes and their relationships to each theme. These candidate themes were then further reviewed and refined. This phase consists of two stages; reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts and reviewing these themes in terms of the entire dataset. A thematic model was created using the themes and subthemes and any refinement that was appropriate was made. The themes were then further analysed, defined and named. Concise names were given to each theme and sub-theme which would give the

reader a sense of what each theme entailed. The final step of the analysis involved the write up of a detailed report on the various themes discovered in the dataset, with supporting quotes. These themes moved beyond just description and linked back to the research questions asked on the Men's Shed.

3.2 Themes

Through the detailed process of thematic analysis outlined above, six major themes emerged in the dataset reflecting the five participants' thoughts and feelings on the Men's Shed. Each theme contains three sub-themes which provide a structure to the large, more complex themes (See Fig. 1 below).

Table 1: Summary of Themes	
Themes	Sub-Themes
Coping with Difficult Life Experiences	- Personal Problems - Transition from Employment to Retirement - Helping Other Men Cope
Belonging to a Group	- Comradery - Sense of Belonging - Teamwork – Teamwork Makes Dream Work
Social Needs	- Interaction with Other Men - Have a Laugh –'Craic' - Something To Do
Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health- 'Man Up'	- Boys Don't Cry - Men versus Women - Trouble Talking
Overall Well-Being	- Mental Health - Sense of Purpose - Mindfulness
Opportunity for Learning	- Acquiring New Skills - No Pressure - Project Work

Fig. 1 Table of Themes and Sub-Themes

3.2.1 Theme 1: Coping with Difficult Life Experiences

The first theme that was evident throughout all the interviews conducted was 'Coping with Difficult Life Experiences'. This referred to the struggles and personal tragedies the participants experienced at a certain period in their lives. The theme deals with how the participants coped with these hardships and how they overcame these adversities. Sub-themes

were developed from this overall theme, these included; personal problems, transition from employment to retirement, and helping other men cope. This theme and its sub-themes relate back to the research questions asked as the participants outlined the positive role the Men's Shed plays in their lives.

Personal Problems:

Various personal tragedies were discussed throughout the interviews. A lot of men felt lost for one reason or another after these tragedies and as a result, found it difficult to cope with life.

Participant 3: *"...Em, in 2014 my poor wife died of cancer and then three weeks later my daughter took her own life".*

Participants discussed how most of the men who attend the Men's Shed have experienced similar situations in the past and by joining, they felt they would receive the appropriate support from men who had been through their own personal struggles. They could relate to these men. The Men's Shed offered an outlet and a listening ear for participants.

Participant 5: *"...I could quote you a couple of examples where guys were in bad places for one reason or another. I don't want to go into too much detail, but where they were very depressed with good reason, and I know for a fact that just having the Men's Shed around helped. It did help".*

Transition from Employment to Retirement:

All five participants in the study were retired and verbalised how they found the transition from working life to retirement very difficult and daunting. Some participants vocalised how they were afraid this transition would have a negative impact on their health.

Participant 5: *"....I was afraid my brain would seize up, talking is so important. Alzheimer's and dementia are so common now".*

Participants discussed how the adjustment to this new lifestyle change took time after having had a routine for the majority of their lives. The Men's Shed allowed them to cope with this difficult life experience.

Participant 1: *"...I felt that there was, after being hands on in the garage for so long, I felt there was a bit of a void in my life then, you know when I retired, so then I decided to join the Men's Shed"*.

Helping Other Men Cope:

Participants outlined how the Men's Shed involved both giving and receiving help. It was a two-way process for most participants. Men who were experiencing rocky times in their lives were offered help and support from other members in the Shed. Certain participants' felt they had similar backgrounds regarding personal tragedies and could therefore provide constructive and sympathetic advice for others.

Participant 3: *"...So, eh and to help other men come around because a lot of men, well not a lot but some have had similar backgrounds to mine and they're lost as well"*.

Participant 5: *"...The whole ethos of the Men's Shed as far as I'm concerned, it's not about what you can do, what you can't do, it's being there for somebody who needs it"*.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Belonging to a Group

The second theme that featured across all participant interviews was 'Belonging to a Group'. Participants spoke strongly about the need to belong to something. The sub-themes that developed from this overall theme were; comradery, sense of belonging, and teamwork. The theme and sub-themes related back to the research questions, with sense of belonging even included as a sub-theme. Participants stated that being part of a group and contributing to the community were important aspects of the Men's Shed.

Comradery:

Comradeship is defined as friendship between a group of people who are doing the same work or who share the same difficulties. This is appropriate and clearly evident in the Men's Shed where men work alongside one another and have experienced similar problematic situations. Participants spoke about the importance of friendship in their lives and how they enjoyed the comradery in the Men's Shed.

Participant 1: *"...It means that you can build up a friendship and a comradery with other men"*.

Participant 5: "…*you will find the comradeship is there"*.

Sense of Belonging:

Participants outlined the need to belong to something. A sense of belonging is a key factor in overall well-being. Being part of a group gives a sense of identity and sense of worth. Many participants had not felt a sense of belonging since retiring and the Men's Shed fostered this sense of belonging for them once more.

Participant 2: *"....I feel like I belong to a group again".*

Participant 4*: "....You belong to something".*

Teamwork – Teamwork Makes Dream Work:

Participants spoke about how they enjoyed the group aspect of different projects and how working as a team gave them a sense of team spirit. One participant outlined how he felt a sense of comfort knowing he was not on his own and how the other men were there if he needed them. Another participant discussed how men disclose more personal stories while working side by side as part of a team rather than in a quiet environment.

Participant 4: "….*Like I mean, I know that eh you come out there doing something, tidying up outside and I know one of the guys will come and help me, it's kind of teamwork like, you know. What is that saying? Em, teamwork makes dream work".*

Participant 5: *".....It's much easier to talk to somebody if you're working alongside them. You're doing something, you're not concentrating. You're actually not realising but you're telling somebody this, that, and the other. And that's the whole thing about it. Men work better or talk better when they're working side by side. That's the ethos. It is true".*

3.2.3 Theme 3: Social Needs

The third theme that was prevalent throughout participant interviews was; 'Social Needs'. This refers to the various social aspects the Men's Shed plays in the participants' lives. Social Needs comprised of three sub-themes which included; interaction with other men, have a laugh-'craic', and something to do. Socialisation plays a major role in an individual's life, especially the elderly who quite often may live alone. Therefore the social

needs of the participants in the Men's Shed are extremely important and relate back to the research questions.

Interaction with Other Men:

Interacting and engaging with others seemed to feature regularly throughout the five interviews carried out. Many participants wanted to meet new people who were in similar situations to themselves. Others simply just wanted to get out of the house and get talking.

Participant 1: "...*It gives you a chance to have a bit of an interaction again with other men*".

Participant 3: "….*So, that was the main motivating factor, was to interact with people and not just lock myself away. In my circumstances, when you are on your own, it is vitally important that you have contact with other people*".

Have A Laugh – 'Craic':

Interestingly, having a laugh and the 'craic' were vital elements involved in the Men's Shed for participants. Light-hearted 'slagging' was common among the members which can be traced back to the Irish sense of humour. Participants found being able to joke and have a chat helped fulfil their socialisation needs in a familiar and comfortable environment.

Participant 1: "…*Have a bit of a laugh, and a chat and the banter and that sort of thing, and slag one another if possible*".

Participant 4: *"...I mean it was great craic".*

Something To Do:

The majority of participants verbalised how the Men's Shed gave them something to do with their time, a sense of purpose. The Men's Shed offered somewhere to go where they could socialise with other men and do something worthwhile. Participants spoke about how it gave them a sense of satisfaction, which improved their mental and physical health.

Participant 4: "…*But I just had to get things to do to get me out of the house. And I found that this would be one*".

Participant 1: "…*because it gives me an outlet. Gives me something to do*".

<u>*3.2.4 Theme 4: Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health- 'Man Up':*</u>

A theme which arose quite often throughout the data was; 'Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health'. This referred to the social stigma that surrounds mental health in Ireland and in particular male mental health. The sub-themes included in this theme were; boys don't cry, men versus women, and trouble talking. Participants spoke about how their generation grew up ignoring any mental health problems they may have suffered from. They were told they had to be tough and simply 'man up'. It is a problem many of the participants unfortunately still struggle with today.

Boys Don't Cry:

Participant 5: "…*Because men, we are notorious, we are bad, we are bad. Like as I always say, big boys don't cry. Most guys you ask how are you doing? "Ah I'm grand, I'm okay". His leg could have fallen off half way up the road, but he's still grand. Particularly my generation. It's what you grew up with. You grew up with this thing that you don't tell anybody you're not well or you need this or you need that, I mean you just get on with it".*

Participants felt that the male stereotype of the 'strong man' was still evident in their generation, as it had been ingrained within them for most of their lives. Some still found it difficult to talk about their feelings and open up to others.

Men versus Women:

It is well known in society that women are more forthcoming discussing their mental health than men are. Men often struggle coming forward with their problems due to the stigma attached to their gender and mental health. This can be attributed to one of the reasons that that the highest proportions of deaths by suicide in Ireland are now men.

Participant 1: *"...Men are not inclined to talk in the same way as women do. Men are always a bit, sometimes you don't eh, men would be reluctant to divulge any secrets they had".*

Participant 5: *"...As I said we don't talk like women. Women, they can ramble on about nothing for hours on end. You could get six or four guys in a room together and they might not talk to each other. They might just talk about football for a few minutes and that's it. They could sit there looking at each other".*

Trouble Talking:

Trouble talking can also be linked to male stereotyping with mental health. Participants outlined how they found it difficult talking about personal issues and were reluctant to open up about their mental health.

Participant 4: "…*And I mean, we all have trouble talking".*

3.2.5 Theme 5: Overall Well-Being

The theme of 'Overall Well-Being' appeared regularly throughout the interviews. This was concerned with participants' mental and physical health and how attending the Men's Shed improved their overall well-being. It also dealt with how the Men's Shed helped participants to overcome the stigma associated with male mental health and talk about their feelings. The overall theme consisted of three sub-themes; mental health, sense of purpose, and mindfulness. Sense of purpose relating back to the research questions.

Mental Health:

In the interviews, participants addressed their mental health and how the Men's Shed improved their well-being. One participant outlined how in the Men's Shed members can discuss personal issues whereas in the past, politics and sports were the major talking point among men.

Participant 2: *"…Well like, it certainly was beneficial for my mental health and like it gives you a reason to get up in the morning and meet new people and get out. Do different things you know".*

Participant 1: "…*It's not always about, down the years, it would have been politics and sport but in the Men's Shed you can talk about sort of personal things and that sort of thing you know".*

Sense of Purpose:

Members vocalised how the Men's Shed offered them a sense of purpose with their lives again. It gave them a reason to get out of bed in the morning and tackle the day. A sense of purpose benefits a person's overall well-being. Sense of purpose relates back to the

research question asked and links in with sense of belonging. The members belong to a group which in turn gives them a sense of purpose.

Participant 1: "…*And it gives you an impetus if you like to put it that way, to get up, or an incentive to get up in the morning and get out and clean yourself up and have somewhere to go. It gives me a purpose. That kind of thing as well*".

Participant 3: "…*I had to get a reason to get up and do things*".

Mindfulness:

Participants spoke about how they engaged in mindfulness courses that were arranged by the Men's Shed. The mindfulness courses were extremely beneficial to some participants.

Participant 4: "…*Well, it wasn't general chit-chat, it was mindfulness. We were just around here and somebody came down and were chatting and she said well okay I'm not gonna talk, you have to talk yourselves, you know*".

After the interview had terminated, participant 1 spoke about mindfulness in the Men's Shed and how he did not enjoy the course. As the dictaphone had stopped at this stage, the researcher took down notes on what participant 1 disclosed. Participant 1 felt mindfulness brought up emotive topics that he did not wish to discuss. This unfortunately links back to the theme of 'Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health' and illustrates how some men still find it difficult to open up and talk about their mental health.

3.2.6 Theme 6: Opportunity for Learning

The final theme that emerged from the dataset was 'Opportunity for Learning'. Opportunity for learning was consistent with all participants. Participants stated how the various projects carried out in the Men's Shed helped them learn new and useful skills. This theme consisted of three sub-themes including; acquiring new skills, no pressure, and project work. Participants outlined how this learning was achieved in a stress-free environment while working alongside other members.

Acquiring New Skills:

Participants discussed how pleased they were with their newfound knowledge and skills. One participant stated that it was never too late to learn and was thrilled the Men's Shed gave him the opportunity to attend the IT course they funded.

Participant 4: "…*I said I had a small bit of computer skill but I said I am learning a bit more now down below you know. I now got an email address you know, and I can look up the weather in Rome or if I'm going anywhere you know*".

Participant 5: "…*And you can learn a lot, not necessarily how to build anything but talking to different people that travel or whatever*".

No Pressure:

The pressure free atmosphere the Men's Shed creates eased the participants into learning and completing different projects. The easy-going environment the Men's Shed offered allowed members to work away at their own speed while also ensuring there was zero competiveness among members.

Participant 1: "…*There is no pressure on you. Whatever you are doing, if you are making something you don't have to be worried about not finishing it today or finishing it the next day, you know that kind of way*".

Participants enjoyed how everyone was of a similar background and ability. Members felt they were all equal and could ask any questions if they arose.

Participant 4: "…*Like I mean, everybody was on the same level that was the main thing*".

Project Work:

The different projects undertaken by the participants also offered them an opportunity to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge. The community benefited from various projects undertaken by the Men's Shed, such as 'Buddy Benches' which were distributed to the local primary school and barn owl boxes for a wildlife organisation in County Wicklow. Contributing to the community gave the members a sense of worth and a sense of purpose relating back to the research questions.

Participant 5: "…*Yeah, like we've got a project we've been asked to do. We did em, we made barn owl boxes, for a wildlife crowd out in Wicklow and they've asked us to do an otter run*".

In summary, participants found time spent at the Men's Shed very worthwhile and beneficial, both for their mental and physical health. The benefits of attending the Men's Shed included; overcoming difficult life experiences, belonging to a group, fulfilling various social needs, improving their overall well-being and furthering their skills and knowledge. Participants highlighted the ongoing issue of stigma associated with male mental health and how some men still struggle to express their feelings and emotions. A mind map of themes and sub-themes can be seen in Fig. 2 below.
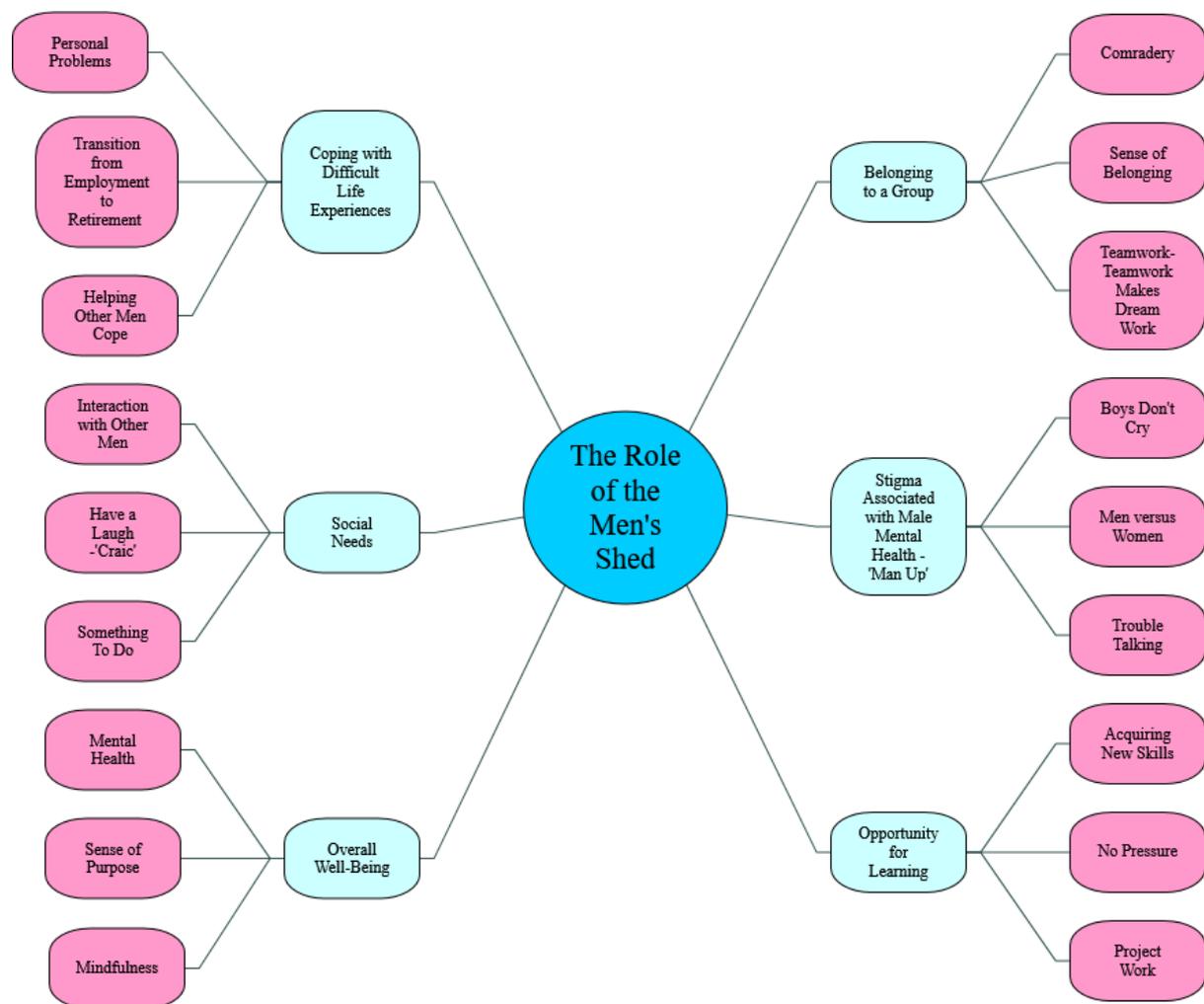

Fig. 2 Mind Map of Themes and Sub-themes.

4. Discussion

The aim of the current study was to qualitatively explore whether males who attend the Men's Shed in Ireland feel a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging by attending the organisation. Extensive Australian research has looked at Men's Sheds and the impact they have on the health and well-being of their members. No previous Irish studies have looked at sense of purpose or sense of belonging in Men's Shed members. Research carried out on an Irish sample of Men's Shed participants by Carragher (2013) and Carragher and Golding (2015), looked at men and learning which left a gap in the research for the current study.

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted where participants were asked to openly discuss the role the Men's Shed plays in their lives. These interviews were then transcribed and analysed by the researcher using thematic analysis. Six themes emerged from the interview transcripts with various sub-themes in each theme which reflected participants' thoughts and experiences about the Men's Shed. These six themes and sub-themes support the current research questions regarding sense of purpose and sense of belonging in the Men's Shed, while also confirming previous research evidence on the Men's Shed.

4.1 Implications

4.1.1 Coping with Difficult Life Experiences

Participants expressed how the Men's Shed helped them overcome difficult periods in their lives such as personal problems and the transition from employment to retirement. Certain participants spoke of how there was a void in their lives since retiring and how the Men's Shed helped them fill this void. These findings support previous research in this area such as Evans, Frank, Oliffe and Gregory (2011) who stated the transition from career and work life to retirement can be difficult and stressful for men. In the current study, many participants experienced various personal tragedies in the past and outlined how members in the Men's Shed helped them to overcome these issues. This offers support to Culph, Wilson,

Cordier and Stanliffe's (2015) study on the experience of depression in older Australian men. They found that participation at the Men's Shed decreased self-reported symptoms of depression, helping members overcome difficult periods in their lives. In addition to this, the current study expanded on depression and delved into bereavement, addiction, illness, and financial problems gaining a deeper insight into participants' struggles.

The findings of this theme in the study show implications for work places nationwide. Organisations should ease or slowly phase their male employees gradually into retirement to avoid the initial shock. Companies need to avail of pre-retirement courses that are already available and book in-house seminars for their staff. In this way, men may be more prepared and ready to cope with this difficult life transition. The findings also show implications for the Irish Government and the Health Service Executive (HSE). The Irish Men's Sheds Association (2016) outlined how men tend to ignore their problems and therefore have been ignored by the Irish health care system. Interventions for male mental health need to be further reinforced by the Irish government and society.

4.1.2 Belonging to a Group

The men in this study stressed the importance of belonging to a group such as the Men's Shed. The Men's Shed fostered a sense of belonging and comradeship among the members through different types of teamwork. This supports Kissane and McLaren's (2006) study that looked at sense of belonging in older adults. They found active interaction and involvement with others produces a sense of belonging, which is a key factor in well-being. The participants in the current study felt that the Men's Shed offered them somewhere to belong.

This research has implications for community groups for the elderly. Men's Sheds and similar groups aimed at the elderly should be frequently advertised and promoted across the country to inform individuals that these organisations exist, and the benefits they have on

members. The majority of the Irish population have never even heard of the Men's Shed. Along with the Men's Shed, other outlets such as Active Retirement Ireland, Hen's Sheds and Irish Countrywomen's Association could also be advertised in free local newspapers and the Irish Farmers Journal.

4.1.3 Social Needs

Men's Sheds promote healthy living by increasing opportunities for successful aging through various social engagements and decrease levels of loneliness and social isolation (Reynolds, 2011). The current study supports these findings from a socialisation perspective. The study did not measure loneliness in particular. Participants found that by interacting and engaging with other men at the Men's Shed, their mental health and overall well-being improved. The Men's Shed gave participants something to do and somewhere to go. The majority of participants discussed the playful side of the Men's Shed where they all could have a laugh and a joke. Research has shown that laughing actually improves mental health and can foster better co-operation and communication among members, leading to a sense of belonging.

The findings have implications not only for Men's Sheds around the country, but also highlight the importance of similar agencies such as ALONE. Organisations such as ALONE are available to support older people living on their own. Members of the public can volunteer with these organisations to improve older people's well-being by simply interacting with them.

4.1.4 Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health- 'Man Up'

In the current study, the stigma associated with male mental health was prevalent among the majority of participants. Participants spoke about growing up in a country that was riddled with male stereotyping and the idea of masculinity. As a result of this, many participants still have trouble talking about personal issues. In 2000, these stereotypical views

were picked up by the World Health Organisation. They identified a lack of understanding the role masculinity plays in shaping men's expectations and behaviours, as a primary cause for the health inconsistencies between men and women. This stigma is consistent with the 2016 Annual Report for the NOSP where the highest proportions of deaths by suicide in Ireland are now men.

This research has implications for the Irish government and the HSE to try to reduce the stigma of male mental health. Canada has introduced a Men's Mental Health Awareness Day. This involves raising awareness of how symptoms of mental health conditions may present themselves differently in men, and to normalise conversations about mental health issues to reduce the stigma that often prevents men from seeking help. Ireland could introduce a similar initiative.

4.1.5 Overall Well-Being

Previous research such as Ford, Scholz and Lu (2015) drew on the social identity theory to examine the extent to which membership in Men's Sheds can influence the quality of life of the members. They found that social identity was a significant predictor of physical health, psychological, and social relationships. These findings align with the current study. Participants found that by attending the Men's Shed, their mental health and well-being improved.

The implications for this theme are similar to the stigma associated with male mental health. The HSE, Irish government and local communities need to reinforce the idea of well-being in males through various schemes and awareness programmes.

4.1.6 Opportunity for Learning

Participants outlined how the Men's Shed gave them the opportunity to acquire new skills in a pressure free environment. These findings support the Carragher (2013), and

Carragher and Golding (2015) studies who looked at men and learning, and found that Men's Sheds are an important part to men's learning and add value to their lives.

The findings show implications for community resource centres and clubs across the country. More funding should be made available to resource centres to enable further learning for older people.

4.2 Strengths and Limitations

4.2.1 Strengths

There are various different strengths to the current research study. A major strength to the study was the use of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the thoughts and experiences of the participants in the Men's Shed. Semi-structured interviews allowed questions to be altered slightly depending on the participant's answers and delve further into their thoughts.

Another key strength to the study was the support and professionalism of the participants in the Men's Shed. Participants invested their time into the interview process and engaged thoroughly with the researcher. The study would not have been possible without their input and help.

4.2.2 Limitations

It is also important to note the limitations of the study. One limitation of the study was the fact that participants recruited were from the same Men's Shed. Participants carried out the same project work as one another and projects are usually decided based on the location of the Shed. These projects would vary in the different Men's Sheds across the country and therefore could have contributed more to the findings. The sample used was quite specific and may not be representative of all Men's Sheds in Ireland. Research into Men's Sheds in different locations is recommended for future studies.

Another possible limitation of the study was the time constraint. Interviews were carried out over the course of two days on participants who were already members of the Men's Shed for a number of years. A longitudinal study could have been more beneficial. This could assess participants who recently joined the Men's Shed and follow their progress over a number of years, giving a more detailed insight into the role of the Men's Shed. Future research could address this limitation and carry out a longitudinal study.

4.3 Future Research

The current research looked in-depth at the role of the Men's Shed in the participants lives. The findings support previous research conducted on Men's Sheds around the world. Future research could use a more representative sample by recruiting participants from different Men's Sheds across the country. This wider sample could give a more accurate reflection of each Men's Shed and discover different views and opinions of the members.

In addition, future research of a longitudinal nature would support and expand the current study. The role of sense of purpose and sense of belonging felt by members of the Men's Shed could be followed closely over a number of years. New members could be recruited for the study and interviewed throughout the duration of their time at the non-profit organisation. In this way, results could be more detailed.

Finally, the theme of 'Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health' would also benefit from future research. Extensive research has been conducted on the stigma associated with male mental health but not on this sample. A longitudinal study interviewing participants on their thoughts about male stereotyping and mental health could be conducted.

4.4 Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore the importance of the Men's Shed in participants lives, in areas such as belonging to a group, completing different projects, and their overall well-being. The study found positive experiences of members in the Men's Shed. The six

main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews related back to the research questions. The six main themes included; Coping with Difficult Life Experiences, Belonging to a Group, Social Needs, Stigma Associated with Male Mental Health- 'Man Up', Overall Well-Being, and Opportunity for Learning. These results illustrated that interaction and socialisation are necessary for men throughout their lifetime and can have a major impact on their physical and mental health. In conclusion, the findings of the current study show implications for the development of more Men's Sheds throughout the country. Awareness surrounding the relatively new organisation needs to be raised to help other men who may be experiencing similar personal problems overcome these struggles and feel a sense of purpose and belonging with their lives again.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Men's Sheds in Ireland

My name is Ciara Cosgrove and I am a Psychology student at Dublin Business School conducting research in the Department of Psychology that explores **Men's Sheds in Ireland.** This research is being conducted as part of my studies and will be submitted for examination.

I am interested in speaking with men who attend the Men's Shed in Greystones, Co. Wicklow. I want to investigate the role the Men's Shed plays in your life. You are invited to take part in this study. Participation involves completing a semi-structured interview with me (lasting approximately 20-30 minutes) which will allow you to say as much as you feel comfortable doing so. An example of a question that may be asked during the interview could be: Why did you decide to join the Men's Shed?

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. **Participation is anonymous and confidential**. Interviews will be recorded using a dictaphone. The data collected will be anonymised by transcribing the recorded interview into electronic format where it will be stored securely on a password protected computer. Quotes from participants will be presented but these will also be anonymised. If any questions raise negative feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview you are consenting to participate in the study.

<u>Contact Details</u>

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact myself, Ciara

Cosgrove, xxxxxxxx@mydbs.ie. My supervisor can be contacted at xxxxx<u>@dbs.ie</u>.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Men's Sheds in Ireland

I have read and understood the attached Information Leaflet regarding this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with the researcher and I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions. I am aware that I can end the interview at any point without giving a reason.

I agree to take part in the study.

Participant's Signature: _____ **Date**: _____

Participant's Name in Print: _____

Appendix C

<u>Debriefing Sheet</u>

Thank you very much for making this study possible. The aim of this research was to explore whether males who attend the Men's Shed in Ireland feel a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging by attending the organisation. Although there has been extensive recent research conducted on the Men's Shed, this research has been mainly conducted on an Australian sample. I wanted to look at an Irish sample.

Support Services

If you have been affected by any of the questions or issues raised in this study, please contact one or more of the support services listed below who may be able to provide help and support. Thank you again for your time.

1**. Samaritans**

- www.samaritans.org
- Phone: 116123 (free)
- Email: jo@samaritans.org

2. **ALONE**

- www.alone.ie
- Phone: 01 679 1032
- Email: hello@alone.ie

3. **Active Retirement Ireland**

- www.activeirl.ie
- Phone: 01-8733836
- Email: info@activeirl.ie

Appendix D

Interview Questions:

Demographic Questions:

1. Do you mind me asking what age you are?

2. Are you currently employed, self-employed, unemployed or retired?

General Questions:

1. How long have you been attending the Men's Shed?

2. Why did you decide to join the Men's Shed?

3. What was the *main* reason you joined? Please explain.

4. Could you tell me what experience or impact the Men's Shed has had on your life since joining?

5. What does it mean to you to be part of a group such as Men's Shed?

6. What aspects of the Men's Shed do you enjoy the most?

7. How do you feel about working in a group with the other men and completing different projects?

8. What projects or group work in particular do you enjoy?

9. Would you attend more often if there were more projects to do here? Please explain.

10. If you could pick one thing you would like to do more of in the shed, what would it be and why?

11. Why is it important for you to keep attending the Men's Shed?

12. If a friend told you they were thinking of joining the Men's Shed, what advice would you give them?

Probing Questions that may or may not be used throughout the interview depending on answers:

- Can you give me an example of this?

- Can you tell me more about that?

- How did that make you feel?

- Could you expand on the reasons for this?

- Have you always felt like that? Why did you feel like this?

- Why was/is that important for you?

- You mentioned "x", what do you mean by "x"?