

Supplementary Table 1: Characteristics and Findings of Included Studies

Author(s), Year, Country	Participants	Research aims	Design	Brief synopsis of findings	Methods
Nilsson et al., 2003 Sweden	n=15 Aged 85-96 6 men 9 women	To highlight the oldest old people's view of their future from the perspective of philosophy of life	Life story interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future seen as everyday life - Future-orientated values - Thoughts about life and death - Future experienced on three different levels: individual, intergenerational and metaphysical - Changed perspective of time 	Hermeneutic Philosophy of life framework Jeffner (1988)
Hinck, 2004 North America	n=19 Aged 85-98 6 men 13 women	To explore everyday activities, concerns, struggles and adaptive strategies of older people living alone in a rural area	Multiple in- depth interviews Home tour Photo elicitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independence at home is important - Creative adaptation strategies: changed environment, activities and patterns - Did not experience social isolation even though living alone in rural area 	Interpretive phenomenology
Caldras & Bertero, 2007 Brazil	n=16 Aged 85-88 6 men 10 women	To uncover the essence of the lived experience if being very old in Brazil	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dissatisfaction with the present - Uncertain future - Self-respect and pride - Adaptation to ongoing life 	Hermeneutic

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Hagglom-Kronlof et al., 2007 Finland	n=10 Aged 99 1 man 9 women	To explore daily occupations	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pride in daily occupations - Embracing challenge and learning new things - Patterns and rhythms of doing things - Sometimes feeling restricted or incapable - Adapted and reshaped sense of self 	Phenomenographic Marton (1994) Alexandersson (1994)
Hovbrand et al., 2007 Sweden	n=21 Aged 82-90 8 men 13 women	To describe how occupational performance outside the home is experienced by older people living alone	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dynamic relationship between person, environment and occupation - Keeping on doing - Drawing on available resources - Prioritizing meaningful occupations - Environment design can compensate for functional losses e.g. public benches 	Phenomenography Marton (1981) Contextual analysis Svensson (1997)
Nygren et al., 2007 Sweden	n=18 Aged 85-90 7 men 11 women	To illuminate the meaning of inner strength	Narrative Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competent in oneself yet faith in others - Looking on bright side without hiding from dark (contemplating death) - Feeling eased but also being active - Being the same yet changing, adjusting - Connected to the past, present and future 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1976) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)

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Fischer et al., 2008 Sweden	n=15 Aged 85+ 5 men 10 women	To illuminate the meaning of the lived experience with respect to changes in later life	Thematic interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embracing weakness and strength - Embracing slowness and swiftness - Embracing reconciliation and regret - Embracing connectedness and loneliness - Opposites, not finding equilibrium but accepting both change and continuity 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1976) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)
Larsson et al., 2009 Sweden	n=18 Aged 85-93 8 men 10 women	To explore how the oldest old are living and managing on their own and to describe their everyday experiences	Semi-structured interviews Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not feel valued in society - Would like to stay independent - Being occupied is important - Time perceived as significant - Not the things they do, but the way in which they do things has changed 	Hermeneutic Giorgi (1985)
Gudmannsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2009 Iceland	n=12 Aged 74-97 7 men 5 women	To get a better understanding of the lived experience of residents in chronic pain in nursing homes	Open interviews, longitudinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primacy of existential pain and suffering - Culmination of losses e.g. loved ones, home, health and independence, connectedness - Some moving towards reconciliation, sources of strength in loved ones - Nurses in care facility perceived as distant 	Interpretive phenomenology Halldorsdottir (2000)

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Smith, 2012 North America	n=12 Aged 74-98 4 men 8 women	To explore how older people experience loneliness and how they cope	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loneliness is embodied as: fatigue, emptiness, tension and withdrawal - Multidimensional losses - Disrupted meaningful engagement due to age-related changes 	Interpretive phenomenology
Ness et al., 2014 Norway	n=12 Aged 82-94 12 men	To illuminate the meaning of being an oldest old man living alone in a rural area and receiving home nursing care	Narrative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of insufficiency - Finding hope and reconciliation - Struggle between a dependent existence and a desire to be independent - Emotionally complex experiences/reflections 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1976) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)
Bergland & Slettebo, 2015 Norway	n=10 Aged 90-92 10 women	To explore how older women who are living alone cope with the challenges of everyday life and how they create a sense of coherence	Semi-structured interviews	<p>Older women's health resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive expectations - Reflection and adaptation - Function and active contribution - Relationships - Home 	Hermeneutic Salutogenic Antonovsky (1979, 1987)

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Clancy et al., 2015 Norway	n=6 Aged 75-98 3 men 3 women	To identify how older people in nursing care perceive falls, falling and fall prevention	Semi-structured interviews Observation	- Did not want to dwell on subject of falls, preferring to discuss past memories - Distanced self from the causes of their fall - Notable differences between experiences of women and men	Hermeneutic van Manen (1997) Heidegger & Levinas
Pusztai, 2015 America	n=13 Aged 87-100 5 men 8 women	To explore lived experiences, particularly in regard to loss and grief	Semi-structured interviews Field notes Observations	- Parallel losses and gains, negative and positive - Acknowledgement that change toward decline is inevitable - Balancing and adapting to changes	Hermeneutic
van Wijngaarden et al., 2015 Netherlands	n=25 Aged 70-99 11 men 14 women	To describe the phenomenon of feeling that 'life is completed and no longer worth living' without terminal or mental illness	In-depth interviews	- Both an inability and an unwillingness to connect with their lives - Aching loneliness - Pain of not mattering - Inability to express oneself - Multidimensional tiredness - Aversion towards dependence	Reflective Lifeworld Phenomenology Dahlberg et al., (2008)

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Saarnio et al., 2017 Sweden	n=20 Aged 85-101 10 men 10 women	To illuminate meanings of 'at-homeness' in people with severe illness	Narrative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time and place are interwoven - At-homeness relies on familiarity and sense of belonging with others - Balance between past, present and future - Acceptance and reorientation 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1981) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)
Sjoberg et al., 2017 Sweden	n=23 Aged 76-101 12 men 11 women	To illuminate meanings of existential loneliness by older people in long-term care	Narrative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being trapped in a failing body - Being met with indifference - Having nobody to share life with - Lacking purpose and meaning - Sense of worthlessness 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1976) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)
Bruun-Olsen et al., 2018 Norway	n=8 Aged 69-91 2 men 6 women	To explore how elderly patients with a hip fracture have experienced their recovery process (4 months after fracture)	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vulnerability, subservience, hopelessness - Tension between self-reliance and dependence on others - Disruption from 'normal' life - Loss of mobility and independence - Impact of age profoundly present 	Hermeneutic Giorgi (1985) Malterud (2012)
Pardo et al., 2018 Italy	n=14 Aged 76-96 2 men 12 women	To explore how is old age experienced by older people attending a social day centre	In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes and limitations related to old age - The experience that comes from having lived a long life, strength-based - An awareness of death 	Hermeneutic Ricoeur (1976) Lindseth & Norberg (2004)