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“THE THIRD AGE”: ASPECTS OF UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

Nowadays social problems of elderly people or so-called people of “the third age”, their social status and their place in modern society, issues of well-being and satisfaction with life are particularly relevant in Russia. In this article the authors propose the approach to the study of elderly people well-being issues and to the determination of social status of elderly people in various societies from the perspective of social gerontology.

In this article the authors present the study of intangible factors, accompanying an elderly person during this period of life. The authors propose the insight into the ways of overcoming the negative characteristics of ageing period, through the creation of conditions for new social relations formation. In modern world, old age is being understood by humanity as the age, which hides large reserves and great potential. The authors highlight the need to learn how to recognize new value orientations in surrounding society as well as in one’s personality. In this regard the support rendered by family and the people of the same age group, surrounding an elderly person, is the most significant aspect in making this period of life happier and more meaningful.

Thus, old age is the phenomenon of more social than physical nature as the psychological development continues up to old age.

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Keywords: The third age, gerontology, ageing process, wellness, wellbeing



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1. Introduction

Social problems of elderly people, their social status along with their place in modern society, social structure, different social systems, communities and their own family, relationships with other age groups, personality change connected with aging – all of these issues nowadays present the subject of various studies. These issues are traditionally studied in terms of special field of sociology – gerontology. “Gerontology is the scientific study of aging that examines the biological, psychological, and sociological (biopsychosocial) factors associated with old age and aging. The factors that affect how we age are broad in scope and diverse: biological factors include genetic background and physical health; psychological influences include level of cognition, mental health status, and general well-being; and sociological factors range from personal relationships to the cultures, policies, and infrastructure that organize society” (Brossoie, 2009). From this point of view, aging is considered as a fundamental biological and social process. The analysis of the mechanisms for this process is significant not only for determination of reasons for aging and development of recommendations for the improvement of socio-economic conditions of life for elderly people, but also for the formation of certain ideological society’s perceptions on elderly people gerontic age.

2. Problem Statement

Even in the ancient world, people were interested about the question of a certain similarity between childhood and old age, and indeed, this kind of comparison occurs quite often. Researchers note that such borderline periods of human life as childhood and old age are characterized by similar features – spiritual carelessness, weak activity of feelings, “childish” level, a tendency to frequent mood changes, uncertainty of movements etc. In this case, both a child and an elderly person estimate their position in society, comparing themselves with an adult person. “When studying emotion regulation in adults, however, researchers have steered way from ontogenetic change, and instead focused on individual differences in emotion regulation. Moreover, when age has been considered, the focus has been on physical decrements in late life thought to cause emotional dysregulation” (Carstensen et al., 2003)

A child is artificially separated from reality by such social institutions as upbringing, guardianship, school, etc. (Pankova et al., 2017). A child sees his goal in the future, in the period of active activity, in the period of adulthood. By analogy, the elderly person is also separated from reality, which is not natural, since the retirement age is defined more likely by social institutions for securing old age that were formed in society, rather than by the implementation of the laws of nature. This period is characterized by such features as loss of ability to work, illness and the inability to act independently. Although nowadays such an understanding of an elderly person is rather conditional.

Old age can be represented in the form of several shorter periods of a person's life:

- Old age 65 – 75 for men, 55 - 75 for women
- Old age – 75 – 90 for men, 75 – 90 for women
- Age of longevity – more than 90 years, which is characterized by attenuation of body functions, it ends with death.

In the Western part of the world, there is the concept of “third age” – this is the period of active life, which begins with retirement. Recently, developed countries have also described the “fourth age” – the age of not so active old age.

Vladimir Shabal in – the member of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, the director of the Russian gerontological scientific and clinical center notes that people are more frightened not by aging itself, but rather by age-related infirmity. But if a person takes care of his health, if he is cheerful and full of strength, then in old age he benefits. “An elderly person gets free time, independence, the opportunity to engage in creativity. Goethe said that old age is the period of golden harvest. Michelangelo was working at the age of 90 years. Leo Tolstoy, Ilya Repin and Ivan Aivazovsky – all of them were long-livers. The main thing here is to have a constant stress. After all, when the athletes quit the sport, the stress disappears and the muscles immediately become flabby. As well as unstressed brain leads to the degradation of human” (Pankova et al., 2017).

The “third age” can also be referred to the stage of person’s life cycle, which is characterized by the change in the nature of their work and way of life and the sphere of professional activity, due to circumstances related to the physiological characteristics of an elderly person. “The third age” is a conditional name for the initial years of retirement age, which precede the decline of life. Often in literature this period of life is characterized as the age of wisdom, common sense, established life philosophy, accumulated vast experience of successes and losses. A person at this age is a contemplator, an observer, an adviser, a consultant, a spiritual mentor, an example of kindness and high morality.

3. Research Questions

During the late age the changes in personal qualities take place. These changes are reasoned by age characteristics of the elderly person. The qualities which were not peculiar to a person in his active period start to manifest. The elderly person gradually loses sensibility, mobility and emotionality. Often elderly people express the sense of parsimony which usually indicates the struggle for independence. Since elderly people for various reasons no longer expect to make money for their own unforeseen needs, the only way for them to manifest independence is parsimony.

The change of environment also plays significant role. For example, if a person becomes incommunicative, this is often due to the fact that old friends are gone, and a person does not have enough opportunities and energy to make new friends.

Aging should be considered as a continuing formation of a person, which includes adaptive and compensatory mechanisms.

The elderly person is affected by a certain group of interrelated social and biological factors of development, which result in the formation of a new status of the personality at a later age. The peculiarities of this stage are presented by changes in the hierarchy of motives with predominance of aesthetically oriented motive. The amplitude of changes in personal characteristics is a kind of reflection of the natural processes of slowing down of aging process and the influence of adverse social factors.

The period of old age has a number of distinctive features, among which the main role is played by the cessation of professional career or changes in its nature (less intensive work and its volume, changes in the scope of activities, etc.). As a result of changes in social status, an elderly person has a lot of free

time, his circle of contacts becomes narrower, and he loses his leading role in family, his functions change. A complex of these factors inevitably leads to the change in life stereotypes and the need to adapt to new conditions.

Simultaneously with the processes typical for such a period as old age, new psychological mechanisms are starting to form, with the help of a person can feel himself a full member of society until old age. For example, if involuntary memory becomes worse, a rich associative memory or the existing skill to write down important information can compensate this defect. Thus, the preservation of intellectual capabilities at the former level is possible only with the help of active interaction in social and practical spheres. Expansion of the sphere of interests and making new friends allow elderly people to overcome flatness and stagnant judgments.

Everyone reacts individually to various kinds of problem situations and differently copes with their internal problems. Often elderly people deny a problem, trying not to notice the problems that cause them inconvenience. Adaptation in this case is achieved by reducing the level of needs (Baltes, 1998). Constant denial of a problem that requires some effort to resolve is a negative aspect of this process, since it often leads to the rejection of what are really necessary things.

4. Purpose of the Study

One of the ways of psychological defense is the opportunity to share your memories in the process of communication with another person who was close to the events of discussion, with a person of the same generation, with a peer. Inclusion is another effective way of psychological protection used by elderly people. In case when a person faces a more difficult situation than his personal problem, the importance of a traumatic event decreases against the backdrop of the tragedy that has occurred in the life of another person. The example of this kind of solution of a problem is compassion. Observing dramatic events in lives of other people a person begins to look at his own failures differently, comparing them to the problems of others.

It should be noted that the role of family in the life of an elderly person increases. It is family relations that can replace lost social contacts in this age period. Assistance in housekeeping, education of children and grandchildren, support of other family members allows elderly person to regain the lost sense of significance, level up self-esteem and adapt to this period of life.

The relationships in family, with friends and neighbors may be diverse. For the majority of elderly people, the most optimal option is to preserve one's own independence with sufficiently close social relations, that is, a rational combination of family care and personal autonomy. Unfortunately, the loneliness of an elderly person is one of the most crucial problems of modern society (Chmykhalo et al., 2017). Psychological dissatisfaction entails a rapid onset of physical ageing, which can even be accompanied by a mental disorder. Many lonely elderly people undergo very difficult financial situation, unlike those who have a family, and a sense of loneliness makes them feel even more lost and unhappy.

Thus, the issues of the "third age" are often of social and psychological nature, since with arrival of this age life does not end, but the quality of life, its eventfulness will depend on a person.

5. Research Methods

When estimating well-being as an object of research, the structure of parameters of satisfaction with life as a whole is taken into account. It is based on indicators describing the identity of the subject (elderly person), determined through identifying priority needs, interests, values and the degree of their satisfaction (Munsey, 2007).

In addition, the indicators take into account the adaptation to the conditions of existence, the degree, the nature and the direction of social, economic and leisure activities.

Adaptive indicators of well-being evaluation are:

- the inner state of an elderly person (the level of health, mood, experienced feelings: happiness, optimism);
- the assessment of external conditions (perception of the situation in a country and the time in which a person has to live);
- the perception of his own position at a given time in comparison with the previous stage.

The selection of indicators of well-being is made in accordance with the developed model and the system of operational indicators designed for evaluation.

Indicators for well-being evaluation are:

- the satisfaction with body comfort, good physical well-being;
- the satisfaction with the material aspect of life (housing, food, rest, etc.), financial stability (material well-being);
- the satisfaction with social status and current state of society, interpersonal communications in the microsocial community (family, relatives, friends, acquaintances) surroundings, etc. (social well-being);
- the awareness and emotional-appraising experience of the meaning of life, the availability of prospects, etc. (spiritual well-being).

The indicators of well-being of elderly are grouped into types according to the subject areas - areas of well-being and include the following significant values:

1. health (physical need, need to avoid harm, protection from physical damage);
2. intimacy, communication with relatives and friends (need for closeness, need for protection, patronage);
3. government assistance (the need for security, the need for protection, patronage, the need for respect and support);
4. material prosperity (need for safety);
5. autonomy, preservation of activity and the ability to act independently (the need for self-realization, the need for autonomy);
6. availability of accommodation (physical need);
7. availability of property (the need for security);
8. continuation of professional activity, employment (physical need, need for safety, need for self-realization, need for creation);
9. participation in public life (the need for recognition and assessment, the need to provide assistance, support of others);

10. The organization of leisure (the need to feel and experience emotions).

The investigation of the aspects of satisfaction includes the development of evaluation methodology, which gives an idea of the individual structural components and factors that affect the degree of satisfaction.

Indicators of subjective factors of well-being should be related to the benefits that can be fixed objectively or as generally recognized facts, or as universal assessments and relations. Before evaluation of the benefit, it should be identified, i.e. it is necessary to find the signs that would help to relate these or other observed phenomena and processes towards good.

In order to increase the availability of obtaining objective information, simple, direct assessment techniques based on the use of single questions and scales should be used.

6. Findings

The issue of aging of population is one of the most important issues in global community.

According to the UN forecasts, by 2025 the number of elderly people will exceed a billion, which will compose 15% of the world's total population. This process should be considered as a demographic revolution, the impact of which is very important especially on economy, politics and society. The adoption of the International Project of Action by the World Assembly on Aging may be estimated as a fact which expresses the degree of concern of States Members of the United Nations. The main points outlined in the Project draw the attention of the governments of these countries to the acute problems of elderly people and. The following goals were set:

- to promote the participation of elderly people in the production and development process along with their active integration into the economic, social, and cultural life of society;
- to deepen the understanding of important humanitarian nature of elderly people problems;
- to develop and to stimulate programs and activities aimed at ensuring social guarantees for the elderly people;
- to encourage and to develop training programs for staff working in social and special medical institutions for the elderly people.

Such problematic issues as reducing of fertility, reducing of the number of working age people, increasing of well-being and health level of elderly people, increasing of life expectancy, typical for developed Western countries, are factors that will increase the number of elderly people and will create an additional burden on socially active part of society (Argyle, 2001). Primarily it touches social security system and health system.

Such interest on the part of researchers is associated with the fact that the process of population aging influences social and economic systems of world countries, from labor market, employment, incomes and consumption, to social funds, state policy, legislation, infrastructure, social relations etc. Elderly people gradually acquire the status of significant economic and political agents, interests, preferences and decisions of which determine not only their own lives, but also the prospects for the development of global economy in general.

7. Conclusion

Nowadays social, economic, and cultural studies on well-being of elderly people have significantly improved the concepts and methods for the evaluation of the quality of life of elderly people, as well as tools for long-term monitoring of social development. The development of theoretical models and empirical analysis in studies of the quality of life and well-being has significantly expanded knowledge on the levels, changes, components and determinants of individual well-being.

In Russia, the standards of living of elderly people are relatively low. The implementation of such long-term programs as, for example, the decree approved by the Government of the Russian Federation titled "Elderly Citizens Strategy until 2025" largely contributes to the solution of this problem. The strategy is focused on the definition of goals, principles, objectives and priorities of state social policy in relation to elderly citizens. The strategy is aimed at addressing the issues of preservation and improvement of health, life expectancy, improvement of livelihoods of this category of citizens, protection of their rights and interests, improvement of their well-being and social well-being, and creation of conditions for active participation in society.

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