

PERSPECTIVES OF OLDER ADULTS ABOUT THEIR PRESENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PROJECTION. REFLECTION WORKSHOPS

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Abstract

In this paper, the results obtained on the perspectives of older adults are presented, particularly in relation to their present situation and future projection. 85 older adults (65 women and 20 men) who took part in different institutions of La Plata City were included. The reflection workshops were in general about aging, psychological and social changes and considerations on the time dimension that they bring.

Implementing these workshops about the mentioned themes has allowed us to establish some issues of interest to develop, design and carry out a specific process of guidance for older adults, in which the protagonist is the subject with its desires and interests, as we conceive that in guidance it is essential to consider the singularity, to support them during the aging process (in some cases marked by retirement), so the older adults can question themselves about their new possibilities, can decide where to be involved, question themselves about interests, motivations and desires, often postponed, since it is not about *spend the spare time*, but to *make new projects and achieve them*.

Keywords: guidance; aging; project; reflection workshops.

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Introduction

In this paper results concerning to the older adults' perception on the current society and its future projection are collected. These themes have been studied in the Study 1 of the before mentioned PhD thesis.

This thesis considers the Guidance Operational Theoretical Model (Gavilán, 2006), and the Active Aging Model (Health World Organization, 2002). The first one, given the expansion of the guidance field, allows to wide its uses to other recipients. It conceives guidance as a continuous process that takes place throughout subject's life in different moments of the vital cycle: puberty, adolescence, adulthood and old age. Then, this idea expands the possibilities of intervention in different evolutionary stages, as well as the different experiences that are involved in choice situations.

The second one reveals a new perspective of old age, by means of the possibilities present during this stage. It refers to human complete fulfillment, which includes good health, social involvement and personal fulfillment.

They both point to the characteristics of our time, in which a particular demographic distribution appears due to the increase of life expectancy, with the progressive growth of aging in the world and in our country. In this way a critical situation appears of individual, social and sanitary troubles that need to be solved. Consequently, plans and programs dedicated to the referred population have been developed from different theoretical fields and management areas.

Such is the case that different authors have pointed the need of expansion of guidance. Hiebert (2005) considers that guidance has to take into account the context and consequently adapt to its changes. González and Omaira (2005) also say to this respect: "the different changes arisen in the theoretical, economic and social world have determined that scientific theories are experiencing a transformation process". They highlight that the need of changes in guidance is seen from re-considering the real current society, with the consequent changes in the educational and labor world. In this scenario, for example, new demands related to adult education, skills, knowledge and particularly with spare time appear. This implies "the creation of new scenarios in guidance to the

interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary interaction, through a new interdependent dialectics” (p.1). Related to this, counselors have to think about their roles and the expansion of their practice field.

Methodology

The mentioned thesis presents a general objective which is to contribute to the design of guidance proposals dedicated to older adults that promote an active aging. This research includes two studies of mixed approach, descriptive-interpretative transectional type. Through interviews, observations and reflection workshops information was collected about the offer of activities, the perspective of older adults about aging and related subjects. Finally, those reflections about the current and future situation arisen from the shared information during the workshops were considered which will become the objective of this work. Besides particular objectives corresponding to Study 1 and Study 1 are proposed. In this work, as it was already said, we will approach the particular purpose of *characterizing the perspectives of older adults about aging and the changes that take place in the current society*, reason why the instruments that allowed getting this information and their results will be mentioned.

Design

It is a study of mixed approach descriptive-interpretative-transectional type, dedicated to collect information regarding the questionings and proposed objectives (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado y Baptista Lucio, 2010).

Participants

85 older adults, 65 women and 20 men, whose ages are between 60 and 76 years old, were included. They were selected from programs of specific centers where different activities are carried out, 25 of them attended to a retirement training program (Table 1).

Table 1. Study 1
Participants' origin, gender and age

PARTICIPANTS OLDER ADULTS	n	Gender		Age
		Female	Male	
Programa de Educación Permanente sede central (Permanent education program, central office)	15	42 70%	18 30%	60-76 years old
Programa de Educación Permanente sede Tolosa (Permanent education program, Tolosa office)	15			
Centro de Jubilados Tacuarí (Tacuari retiree center)	15			
Centro de Jubilados Sadop (Sadop retiree center)	15			
Programa Preparación para la Jubilación – PREJUBI de la UNLP (Retirement training program, La Plata National University)	25	23 92%	2 8%	
Total	85	65 76,47%	20 23,53%	

Although the same proportion of both genders was expected, the majority of women is due to they attend more frequently to these institutions. Almost all cases have been included in formal or informal work system, the rest have not worked outside the home.

Regarding the educational level, complete high school prevailed. There are also some cases with higher educational level, university and non-university. A smaller proportion corresponds to complete elementary education.

Instruments

- Semi-structured interview. It was dedicated to indentify different topics: demographic data, educational level, occupation, motivation for the previous educational or occupational choice, motivation for the choice of current activities, events in their personal history that marked milestones, perspectives in front of aging and retirement, family impact due to the

situation change, coexistence group, need of retirement training and presence/absence of future projects.

- Reflection workshops about aging, psychological and social changes and considerations on the time dimension involved. They particularly refer to: *a) spare time management; b) the older adults' image in mass media; c) the older adults' point of view about the current society and their inclusion and d) health considerations.*

These themes were chosen from semi-structured interviews previously performed which, as the workshops, were carried out in the origin institution of each participant.

Procedures of data collecting

Before collecting data, we counted with the participants' consent, who were told about the reach of the investigation, ensuring them anonymity and confidentiality.

Interviews were individual, as much in the older adults case as in the key informants. They were recorded, with their consent.

• Results and discussion

• *Spare time management*

It is about how to take advantage of this spare time that appears as an opportunity after labor retirement, or once sons are independent. For example, one of the main identified issues was the sons' intentions to "use" this new time to dedicate to the care of grandsons, often without considering grandparents' possibilities and/or availability. Recovering this time is felt as the recovery of autonomy and independence.

It is found through this workshop activity that there is neither organization nor plans for spare time, it is rather a time used in present, limited to certain "moments". It could be thought that this is related to the fact that spare time is something new and unknown. Consequently it is necessary to get use to it and to

recognize this new situation, to be able to develop and plan projects/activities which transcend an isolated “moments”.

About leisure, although most of participants had a right concept, some of them consider that it is unproductive, without recognizing that it favors personal development. The following answers are illustrative:

- *(Woman, 64 years old). “It is doing nothing, only letting time goes by, although sometimes I feel that when I take care of my plants it is a moment of relax and leisure for me”.*
- *(Man, 73) ““The enjoyment of a moment of recreation in what interests me most. It can be watching a movie. A walk by a quiet place, alone or accompanied. It can also be doing nothing”.*
- *(Woman, 74). “...it is stop doing, stop studying or working. Leisure does not take you to a anywhere good ...”*
- *(Woman, 70).”It is the moment that we dedicate to do things that we cannot do when working or fulfilling responsibilities. It must be something pleasant, to be enjoyed”.*

- *The older adults’ image in mass media*

The influence of mass media on aging and old age topics was determined. The interest arose on approaching this issue analyzing advertising and news in graphic and audiovisual media. Issues such as the language used to refer to the older people appeared, a language that suggests negatively, offensive, outdated and wrong. For example, when referring to an older adult as "grandpa" without the corresponding family relationship; or name them according to age as “septuagenarian”, or using childish words when referring to them as “little old men”. Another subject refers to their apparently limited interests, for example the retirement wages dates, trips and excursions offers, among others. Likewise the beauty and success image appears almost always concerning to youth. Other issues that were analyzed refer to show older adults as crime victims, in passive attitude, as a kind of objects of different kind of practices.

On the contrary, those involved feel themselves as subjects of full rights able to contribute to society.

- *(Woman, 65 years old). "They must think that we are interested in anything other than when we receive our retirement wages, besides they use words like octogenarian and show above all when there are accidents or robberies".*
 - *(Man, 68). "Today a lot of importance is given to youth since everything is directed towards them, even advertising. It is unusual to find some interview to older adults and it is a pity, since there are so many valuable and educated people that have so much to give".*
 - *(Man, 66). "Almost no media talks about older adults and of what we can give, we are always shown as receivers, but not as providers."*
- *The older adults' point of view about the current society and their inclusion*

Changes in society, in habits and principles are a recurrent theme in the studied population. One of the most remarkable issues regarding this topic, beyond the older adults' sayings, refers to how surprised they were when they were called to talk about how they look themselves included in today's society.

They point as negative changes the loss of certain principles and habits as family bonds, solidarity, among others, not always considered as such by their family and social group. The speech of older adults, who entered the XXI st century and have gone through their lives in the previous century, becomes a little pessimistic. They usually talk about the lack of future of younger generations in the current context. On the other side, they see their present situation as kinder than their ancestors', generally due to scientific or technological advances, to the expansion of communication through virtual media and to the opportunities provided by the increase of life expectancy and the policies consequently designed.

Finally, another two points have to be noticed, on one side the cultural barriers, in this case referred to lack of information about computer science, that makes them feel "illiterate" and excluded. Besides accessibility obstacles appear, referred to different aspects as the city infrastructure (stairs to reach a rest room in

restaurants, means of transport, traffic and housing not adapted to their present condition). Some examples of the above are:

- (Man, 74 years old). *“The ‘each man for himself’ thing is very used, today is all what matters. Most of our generation thought more about the future. We are also afraid of the present because personal safety, job security, education and respect for the authorities declined a lot. We are technically much better assisted, so our life expectancy has grown. That same technology gives us more comfort”.*
- (Woman, 66). *“We reach old age with better health than previous generations, the life expectancy has grown, starting a new inter-generational phenomenon, many children can enjoy great grandparents, which before was unthinkable”.*

- Health concepts

It is to highlight the updated notion they have about health. Traditionally the “old man” has been object of medical practices reducing the process of health-illness to biology and medication. However, the participants have talked about an integral health concept and the adoption of healthy lifestyle. Some of them mention almost by heart the WHO’s traditional definition of health, others propose an almost philosophical or romantic definition.

- (Woman, 69) *“Social, physical and psychological situations combination, and the environment is also very important. Environment plus family and society”.*

Conclusions

The workshop mode has encouraged the relation among the participants, enriching the reflection. Approaching spare time allowed considering a new time and how to make sense to it. Regarding the image constructed by the media on older adults, some prejudices were found out. Concerning their vision on the present society they point out changes, some positive and others negative, comparing their youth with the current one, as well as their old age with their ancestors’. Presently, the attempt to promote a positive image of old age coexists

with the “zapping culture”, consumerist subjectivity, a praise of beauty and eternal youth ideals. Under this assumption we have to re-think the place of the older adults in the XXI st century society, which reveals a new way to age, which lacks of previous models, but that possibly will become a referent to future generations.

Beyond discussions about each topic, it is to highlight how surprised they were to be called to talk about how they look themselves included in today’s society. In spite of biology and medication are the core of health procedures in aging, they have shown integral and positive notions of health.

Implementing these workshops about the mentioned themes has allowed us to establish some relevant issues to develop design and carry out a specific process of guidance for older adults, in which the protagonist is the subject with its desires and interests. We conceive that in guidance, it is essential to consider singularity, to support them during the aging process (in some cases marked by retirement), so they can question themselves about their new possibilities, decide where to be involved, inquire themselves about their interests, motivations and desires, often postponed, since it is not about *spend the spare time*, but to *make new projects and achieve them*.