Elderly Peoples’ Perception of Young People – A Preliminary Study

*Mateusz CYBULSKI¹, Elżbieta KRAJEWSKA-KUŁAK¹, Paweł SOWA², Magda ORZECHOWSKA³, Katarzyna VAN DAMME-OSTAPOWICZ¹, Emilia ROZWADOWSKA¹, Andrzej GUZOWSKI¹

1. Dept. of Integrated Medical Care, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Białystok, Białystok, Poland
2. Dept. of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Białystok, Białystok, Poland
3. Faculty of Health Sciences, Medical University of Białystok, Białystok, Poland

*Corresponding Author: Tel: +48 857485528 Email: mateusz.cybulski@umb.edu.pl

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Abstract

Background: Aging is becoming a more noticeable phenomenon in Poland and Europe. We analysed the perception of youth by elderly and compared attitudes of students of the University of the Third Age (SU3A) with nursing homes residents (NHR) to young people.

Methods: Our questionnaire was distributed to 140 people over the age of 50 (70 SU3A and 70 NHR).

Results: 85.0% of all respondents answered positively to the question "Do you enjoy contact with young people?", even though their contacts are usually limited and mostly confined to a few s a year. Vast majority of NHR (62.9%) and almost half SU3A (48.6%) believe that there is a need to integrate seniors and youth to achieve mutual benefits.

Conclusion: Young people would benefit from the life experience of the elderly; the elderly could become more active in many areas of life.

Keywords: Aging, Elderly, Nursing home, Youth

Introduction

Aging is becoming a more noticeable phenomenon in Poland and Europe. The world population is getting older and Poland has joined the group of countries known as ‘demographically old’. Polish Central Statistical Office data indicate that the pace of aging is fast and by 2030 the percentage of people over age 65 will increase to 21.1% (1). Declining birth rate and increasing life expectancy due to improvement in social and living conditions, better access to health care services, health promotion and education and people's activity (2) contribute to this process.

There are various definitions of old age in current literature. WHO divides old age into three stages: older age (60-70 years), old age (75-90 years) and lifelong age (including people over 90 years of age). In the United States, two categories are often used: young old (65-75 years) and old (over 75 years) (3). Various aspects of old age should be considered. Biologically, aging is a process of constant decline in biological activity of the body, which occurs with increasing age. Mental aging involves changes in memory, learning, thinking and analyzing, often resulting from neurodegenerative disorders of various kinds. Mental disorders in geriatrics include affective and cognitive disorders. These include dementia, depression and delirium (so-called "3xD"; major geriatric syndromes (4). Aging can also be analyzed in the social aspect, for example, by studying the percep-
tion of old age by an individual person or society (5). Studies have shown that older people who stay intellectually active are healthier, physically and intellectually fitter than inactive people of the same age. They often also feel younger and fitter than those people (6). Students of the University of the Third Age (SU3A) and residents of nursing homes (NHR) are a perfect example of this relationship. SU3A have a more positive attitude to others and the world. They are intellectually efficient and engage in social activities to prevent the marginalization in social life (7). The opposite situation occurs in nursing homes. Residents of these institutions are often introverted. They do not partake in social activities, partially due to poor access to them. Most of NHR are physically or mentally disabled which complicates daily lives of their families. As a last resort they are moved to a nursing home. Therefore typical psychological problems (depression and dementia) occur commonly in this group.

We studied the perception of the young by elderly and compared the attitudes of SU3A and NHR to young people.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted between 18 October and 27 November 2012 on a group of 140 people over the age of 50: 70 SU3A from Bialystok and 70 people NHR from Bialystok: Nursing Home, Franciscan Sisters’ Nursing Home and Christian Baptist Church Nursing Home. A diagnostic poll method with authorial questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was developed by researchers - the authors of the article. It contained 26 single and multiple choice questions regarding demographics, assessment of the young by the elderly and senior-youth relationships. SU3A they completed the survey, and NHR - with the help of researchers (researchers ask questions and check the answers given by the residents).

The study was approved by the Bioethical Committee of the Medical University of Bialystok. Data collection and processing were carried out in line with Polish Personal Data Protection law. Statistical analysis was performed using Statistica 10.0 software. Chi-square ($\chi^2$) test of independence was used with a statistical significance $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

Results

Our study group consisted of 104 women (74.3%) and 36 men (25.7%). There was an over-representation of women who represented 84.3% of SU3A and 64.3% of NHR. In order to obtain similar age groups respondents were assigned to one of 5 age groups (Table 1).

| Age (yr)  | SU3A | NHR | Total |
|----------|------|-----|-------|
| 50-55 years | -    | 6   | 6     |
| 56-60 years | 13   | 13  | 26    |
| 61-70 years | 37   | 12  | 49    |
| 71-75 years | 12   | 11  | 23    |
| > 76 years | 8    | 28  | 36    |
| Total     | 70   | 70  | 140   |

39.0% of the respondents were widowed, 26.4% married, 18.0% divorced and 15.7% single.

Only 2 SU3A lived in the countryside, other respondents lived in the city. Vast majority of the study group (75.7%) lived alone and 15.7% with a spouse. Secondary education was a dominant education level (42.9%), followed by a higher (38.6%) and vocational (18.6%) degree. Higher education prevailed amongst SU3A (60.0%), 48.6% of NHR were educated to secondary level.

Over 47.0% respondents considered their living conditions ‘good’ (57.1% SU3A and 47.1% of NHR), 40.0% considered them to be ‘average’: 38.6% of SU3A and 41.4% of NHR).

Almost 60% of respondents had grandchildren: 61.4% SU3A and 57.1% NHR. Those who were
grandparents were asked to assess their relationship with the grandchildren. Every other SU3A ranked them as 'very good' (51.2%). 32.6% considered them "good" 14.0% "neither good nor bad" and 2.3% ‘poor’ No one considered them to be "very bad".

Table 2: Relationship between gender and opinion on the activities of young people (χ² test)

| What are, in your opinion, the activities of young people? | SU3A | NHR |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|-----|
| Watching TV                                               |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 28 (47.5) | 7 (63.6) | 33 (73.3) | 20 (80.0) |
| no                                                        | 31 (52.5) | 4 (36.4) | 12 (26.7) | 5 (20.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.324 | P = 0.533 |
| Listening the music                                       |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 31 (52.5) | 2 (18.2) | 36 (80.0) | 21 (84.0) |
| no                                                        | 28 (47.5) | 9 (81.8) | 9 (20.0)  | 4 (16.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.036 | P = 0.680 |
| Meeting friends                                           |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 39 (66.1) | 6 (54.5) | 37 (82.2) | 22 (88.0) |
| no                                                        | 20 (33.9) | 5 (45.5) | 8 (17.8)  | 3 (12.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.463 | P = 0.524 |
| Sport activities                                          |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 28 (47.5) | 4 (36.4) | 31 (68.9) | 19 (76.0) |
| no                                                        | 31 (52.5) | 7 (63.6) | 14 (31.1) | 6 (24.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.498 | P = 0.528 |
| Reading books                                             |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 13 (22.0) | 2 (18.2) | 19 (42.2) | 9 (36.0)  |
| no                                                        | 46 (78.0) | 9 (81.8) | 26 (57.8) | 16 (64.0) |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.775 | P = 0.611 |
| Hobbies                                                   |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 13 (22.0) | 2 (18.2) | 27 (60.0) | 18 (72.0) |
| no                                                        | 46 (78.0) | 9 (81.8) | 18 (40.0) | 7 (28.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.775 | P = 0.315 |
| Drinking alcohol                                          |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 20 (33.9) | 2 (18.2) | 26 (57.8) | 19 (76.0) |
| no                                                        | 39 (66.1) | 9 (81.8) | 19 (42.2) | 6 (24.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.303 | P = 0.127 |
| Partying                                                  |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 36 (61.0) | 9 (81.8) | 35 (77.8) | 22 (88.0) |
| no                                                        | 23 (39.0) | 2 (18.2) | 10 (22.2) | 3 (22.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.186 | P = 0.292 |
| Watching sport events                                     |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 28 (47.5) | 5 (45.5) | 29 (64.4) | 16 (64.0) |
| no                                                        | 31 (52.5) | 6 (54.5) | 16 (35.6%) | 9 (36.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.903 | P = 0.970 |
| Walking around the city                                   |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 20 (33.9) | 3 (27.3) | 18 (40.0) | 13 (52.0) |
| no                                                        | 39 (66.1) | 8 (72.7) | 27 (60.0) | 12 (48.0) |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.668 | P = 0.333 |
| Drugs                                                     |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 15 (25.4) | 1 (9.1)  | 21 (46.7) | 15 (60.0) |
| no                                                        | 44 (74.6) | 10 (90.9) | 24 (53.3) | 10 (40.0) |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.236 | P = 0.285 |
| Cinema                                                    |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 18 (30.5) | 3 (27.3) | 21 (46.7) | 15 (60.0) |
| no                                                        | 41 (69.5) | 8 (72.7) | 24 (53.3) | 10 (40.0) |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.830 | P = 0.285 |
| Pubs, cafes                                               |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 29 (49.2) | 5 (45.5) | 30 (66.7) | 21 (84.0) |
| no                                                        | 30 (50.8) | 6 (54.5) | 15 (33.3) | 4 (16.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.822 | P = 0.118 |
| Sightseeing                                               |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 16 (27.1) | 1 (9.1)  | 26 (57.8) | 15 (60.0) |
| no                                                        | 43 (72.9) | 10 (90.9) | 19 (42.2) | 10 (40.0) |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.201 | P = 0.856 |
| Concerts                                                  |      |     |
| yes                                                       | 13 (22.0) | 9 (81.8) | 28 (62.2) | 16 (64.0) |
| no                                                        | 46 (78.0) | 2 (18.2) | 17 (37.8) | 9 (36.0)  |
| χ² test                                                   | P = 0.775 | P = 0.883 |
Similar results were obtained in NHR: "very good" 42.5%, "good" 30.0%, "neither good nor bad" 25.0% and "poor" 2.5%. None of the respondents in this group answered "very bad". 85.0% of all respondents answered positively to the question "Do you enjoy contact with young people?" (84.3% SU3A and 85.7% NHR). Some residents emphasized they preferred the company of young people to other residents of these institutions. Although NHR appreciate the company of the young, their contacts with young people are sporadic. Nearly 29.0% NHR said they met with them up to several times a year. About 85.0% of all respondents answered positively to the question "Do you enjoy contact with young people?" (84.3% SU3A and 85.7% NHR). Some residents emphasized they preferred the company of young people to other residents of these institutions. Although NHR appreciate the company of the young, their contacts with young people are sporadic. Nearly 29.0% NHR said they met with them up to several times a year. Some residents emphasized they preferred the company of young people to other residents of these institutions. Although NHR appreciate the company of the young, their contacts with young people are sporadic. Nearly 29.0% NHR said they met with them up to several times a year.

Table 3: Relationship between gender and opinion on the behavior of young people ($\chi^2$ test)

| Positive feature               | SU3A        | NHR         |  |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|  |
|                               | Female n (%)| Male n (%)  |  |
| Kindness                      | yes 26 (44.1) 5 (45.5) 28 (62.2) 16 (64.0) | yes 18 (30.5) 2 (18.2) 24 (53.3) 10 (40.0) | $P = 0.932$  $P = 0.883$ |
|                               | no 33 (55.9) 6 (54.5) 17 (37.8) 9 (36.0) | no 41 (69.5) 3 (27.3) 21 (47.6) 15 (60.0) | $P = 0.406$  $P = 0.285$ |
| Respect                       | yes 18 (30.5) 2 (18.2) 24 (53.3) 10 (40.0) | yes 27 (45.8) 8 (72.7) 30 (66.7) 19 (76.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 41 (69.5) 3 (27.3) 15 (33.3) 6 (24.0) | no 32 (54.2) 3 (27.3) 21 (47.6) 15 (60.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Willingness to help           | yes 27 (45.8) 8 (72.7) 30 (66.7) 19 (76.0) | yes 27 (45.8) 8 (72.7) 30 (66.7) 19 (76.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 32 (54.2) 3 (27.3) 15 (33.3) 6 (24.0) | no 32 (54.2) 3 (27.3) 15 (33.3) 6 (24.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Understanding the needs       | yes 7 (11.9) 4 (36.4) 19 (20.0) 2 (8.0) | yes 7 (11.9) 4 (36.4) 19 (20.0) 2 (8.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 52 (88.1) 7 (63.6) 26 (80.0) 23 (92.0) | no 52 (88.1) 7 (63.6) 26 (80.0) 23 (92.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Trust                         | yes 12 (20.3) 3 (27.3) 2 (4.4) 4 (16.0) | yes 12 (20.3) 3 (27.3) 2 (4.4) 4 (16.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 47 (79.7) 8 (72.7) 43 (95.6) 21 (84.0) | no 47 (79.7) 8 (72.7) 43 (95.6) 21 (84.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Honesty                       | yes 18 (30.5) 1 (9.1) 13 (28.9) 5 (20.0) | yes 18 (30.5) 1 (9.1) 13 (28.9) 5 (20.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 41 (69.5) 10 (90.9) 32 (71.1) 20 (80.0) | no 41 (69.5) 10 (90.9) 32 (71.1) 20 (80.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Willingness to listen         | yes 21 (35.6) 1 (9.1) 9 (20.0) 6 (24.0) | yes 21 (35.6) 1 (9.1) 9 (20.0) 6 (24.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 38 (64.4) 10 (90.9) 36 (80.0) 19 (76.0) | no 38 (64.4) 10 (90.9) 36 (80.0) 19 (76.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
| Sense of bonding              | yes 16 (27.1) 5 (45.5) 3 (6.7) 1 (4.0) | yes 16 (27.1) 5 (45.5) 3 (6.7) 1 (4.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |
|                               | no 43 (72.9) 6 (54.5) 42 (93.3) 24 (96.0) | no 43 (72.9) 6 (54.5) 42 (93.3) 24 (96.0) | $P = 0.101$  $P = 0.414$ |

Vast majority of NHR (62.9%) and almost every other SU3A (48.6%) agreed that there was a need to integrate seniors and the young.

Table 3 lists major types of behaviour of young people towards the elderly. In both groups ‘to help’ was the most frequently chosen positive behaviour of today’s youth (60.0%); ‘indifference’ was the negative one (59.3%). There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and assessment of understanding of the needs by the SU3A ($P = 0.040$). More than 61% NHR responded "do not know" to the question "Would you ask youth for help in a difficult situation?". It was different amongst SU3A - many of them (37.1%) would ask young people for help. Subjects in both groups declared they had received help from a young person to greater or lesser extent at some point in their recent life. SU3A chose "from time to time" most often (38.6%), while NHR chose "many times" (33.3%).

Available at:  
http://ijph.tums.ac.ir
In addition, respondents were asked, "In what sense seniors-youth contacts can be positive for an elderly person?". Majority of respondents (80.0%) agreed that "contact with young people allows them to learn new skills, such as computer skills, use of the Internet." There was no statistically significant relationship between gender and perception of the impact of a senior-youth contact for older people (Table 4).

Table 4: Relationship between gender and perception of the impact of senior-youth contacts on the elderly (χ² test)
Discussion

There have been many publications on aging, but very few pertain to assessment of the young by elderly people. In order to minimize the negative effects of aging the elderly should participate in various forms of activity. One of them is physical activity. Lampinen et al. have shown a relationship between physical activity and intellectual efficiency as well as well-being in old age (8). Regular exercise appears to be an ‘anti-aging’ factor with a positive impact on the well-being of the elderly. Gębska-Kuczerowska study on over 65’s also confirmed that physically active people are in a better physical and mental condition, contract less cardiovascular disease and are rarely hospitalized (9). An interesting study on the impact of physical activity on older people was conducted by Chipperfield et al. (10). Their results suggested that the level of physical activity may be associated with mortality. Kaczmarczyk et al. suggest that increased activity of the elderly prevents loneliness and isolation and promotes independence until very late of life (3). The elderly should maintain interpersonal (social) contacts, but it is often unachievable in the institutionalized older people. Withdrawal from professional life and limited social roles has a significant negative impact on the emotions and personality of the elderly (7). Many studies focused on aging and living conditions of the elderly confirm that strong emotional bonds with friends and family have a positive impact on health and psychological well-being of older people (8, 11-15).

Aging populations around the world need to develop policies to encourage and allow older people to feel equal to younger generations. A frequent and systematic contact with young people and integration of both groups should be an important part of such policies.

Conclusion

1. Participation of the elderly in the activities of the University of the Third Age is more popular among women.

2. Despite a positive attitude of SU3A and NHR to young people, their contacts with them are rare, particularly amongst NHR.

3. There is a need for a mutually beneficial integration of seniors and the young. Young people would have an opportunity to learn from seniors’ life experience and the elderly would gain a chance of activation in many areas of life.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, Informed Consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by the authors.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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