

Old age and aging in the opinion of high school students as a predictor of attitudes towards the elderly

Starość i starzenie w opinii licealistów jako predyktor postaw wobec osób starszych

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Abstract

Introduction. The aging of the population raises the need to build positive intergenerational relations. Particularly important in this context is the attitude of young people towards the elderly, as it can indicate the directions of activities that could support the building of these relationships. **Purpose of the study.** The purpose of the study was to find out the attitudes of high school students towards the elderly and old age on the basis of a survey of high school students and to verify attitudes according to the Kogan scale. **Material and methods.** The study was conducted in a group of 200 students aged 15-19 years in one of the selected high schools of the Rzeszów Poviát, of which 100 students were surveyed in 2019 and 100 students in 2023. The research used a self-administered survey questionnaire and the Attitudes Towards Older People Questionnaire P-LS by N. Kogan. **Results.** In the surveyed group, 119 (59.5%) young people described a person over 60 as "elderly." Despite the fact that 122 (61.0%) of the young respondents did not live with their grandparents and 125 (62.5%) of the students did not participate in any volunteer activities, 97 (48.5%) of the young people had very good relations with their grandparents, 127 (63.5%) of the respondents indicated that the attitude towards the elderly in their immediate environment was very kind. Also, 111 (55.5%) of the respondents said that elderly people were needed in society. There were neither any differences between variables such as age, gender, place of residence, living with grandparents or relationship assessment with grandparents and attitudes towards the elderly according to the Kogan scale. **Conclusions.** The young had a positive attitude towards the elderly, a benevolent attitude and they felt there was a need for the elderly in their society. Also, age, gender, place of residence, living with grandparents, nor evaluation of relations with them in the study group did not differentiate their attitudes towards the elderly. *Gerontol Pol 2025; 33; 115-121* doi: 10.53139/GP.20253311

Keywords: youth, attitudes, elderly, old age, aging, P-LS N. Kogan

Streszczenie

Wstęp. Starzenie się populacji rodzi potrzebę budowania pozytywnych relacji międzypokoleniowych. Szczególne znaczenie ma w tym kontekście postawa młodzieży wobec osób starszych, gdyż może wskazać kierunki działań które mogłyby wspierać budowanie tych relacji. **Cel pracy.** Celem pracy było poznanie postaw młodzieży licealnej wobec osób starszych i starości na przykładzie badań sondażowych wśród uczniów liceum oraz weryfikacja postaw według skali Kogana. **Materiał i metody.** Badania przeprowadzone w grupie 200 uczniów w wieku 15-19 lat w jednym z wybranych liceów z powiatu rzeszowskiego, z czego 100 uczniów w 2019 roku i 100 uczniów w 2023 roku. W badaniach wykorzystano kwestionariusz ankiety własnej oraz Kwestionariusz Postaw wobec Ludzi Starszych P-LS N. Kogana. **Wyniki.** W badanej grupie 119 (59,5%) ludzi młodych określa osobę powyżej 60 roku życia jako „starszą”. Pomimo tego, że 122 (61,0%) młodych badanych nie mieszka z dziadkami i 125 (62,5%) uczniów nie uczestniczy w żadnych działaniach o charakterze wolontaryjnym to 97 (48,5%) młodych odznacza się bardzo dobrymi relacjami ze swoimi dziadkami, 127 (63,5%) badanych wskazuje, że stosunek do osób starszych w ich najbliższym otoczeniu jest bardzo życzliwy. Również 111 (55,5%) badanych twierdzi, że ludzie starsi są potrzebni w społeczeństwie. Nie wykazano również różnic pomiędzy zmiennymi takimi jak wiek, płeć, miejsce zamieszkania, mieszkanie z dziadkami czy ocena relacji z nimi a postawą wobec osób starszych według skali Kogana. **Wnioski.** Młodzi prezentują pozytywną postawę wobec osób starszych, życzliwy stosunek oraz potrzebę osób starszych w społeczeństwie. Również wiek, płeć, miejsce zamieszkania, mieszkanie z dziadkami, czy ocena relacji z nimi w badanej grupie nie różnicuje ich postawy wobec osób starszych. *Gerontol Pol 2025; 33; 115-121* doi: 10.53139/GP.20253311

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież, postawy, osoba starsza, starość, starzenie, P-LS N. Kogana

Introduction

Old age is a natural and inevitable process, and it can be defined in various ways. According to Zych, old age is an inevitable process of aging, where psychological, biological and social processes interact leading to interference with both biological and psychological balance without the possibility of counteracting [1].

Population aging is a long-term process that is observed in various regions of the world especially in those countries that are rich. In Poland, too, a demographic transformation is being observed, the beginning of which was already visible several decades ago. These changes concern the age structure of the population, which is changing, i.e. the share of elderly people is increasing and the share of pre-working age people in the total population is decreasing. The number of people aged 65 and over in 2024 was 7.7 million. The share of the population in this age group in the total population is determined by the old-age ratio and in 2024 was (20.6%), where in 1990 people in this age group accounted for (10%) of the population [2].

In Poland, the growing process of aging of the population has been evident in recent years. It is observed that the number of elderly people in the Polish population is steadily increasing. Projections by the Central Statistical Office predict that the number of people 60+ in Poland will increase to 10.8 million in 2030, and to 13.7 million in 2050. As a result of this projection, the elderly will make up about 40.4% of the total population in 2050 [3].

The apparent dynamic growth of the elderly in society is becoming a demographic challenge generating the need to analyze intergenerational relations, especially the attitudes of the younger generation towards seniors. The young often display ambivalent attitudes towards the elderly, combining respect with entrenched stereotypes and prejudices. The period of youth and adolescence is the time when a young person's personality is shaped, so it is possible to influence young people's attitudes and behavior during this period [4].

It is important to analyze the current attitudes of young people towards the elderly and identify factors that influence their formation. At the same time, understanding these attitudes is key to promoting positive intergenerational relations and countering discrimination against the elderly in society.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to find out the attitudes of high school students towards the elderly and old age using a survey of high school students as an example, and to verify attitudes according to the Kogan scale.

Material and method

The research was conducted in a group of 200 students aged 15-19 in one of the selected high schools in the Rzeszow Province, including 100 students in 2019 and 100 students in 2023. The research used a self-administered survey questionnaire and the Attitudes Towards Older People Questionnaire P-LS by N. Kogan. The self-administered questionnaire includes questions on the evaluation of relations with the elderly, old age and attitudes towards the elderly. The self-administered questionnaire uses typology, opinions, questions, and attitude terms commonly used in the literature in the context of perceptions of old age and elderly people [6,7]. The P-LS Attitudes Towards Older People Questionnaire by N. Kogan contains 17 pairs of "a" and "b" statements (sentences) describing attitudes towards the problems of old people. The findings were subjected to statistical analysis in the program PSPP ver 1.6.2. Statistical tests, among others Shapiro-Wilk, were used to process the data. A statistical significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted.

Results

The study was conducted in a group of 200 students aged 15-19 in one of the selected high schools in the Rzeszow Province, with the first group of 100 students in 2019 and the second group of 100 students in 2023. The average age was 16.92, ranging from 15 to 19 years old (table I).

61 (30.5%) male students and 139 (69.5%) female students were surveyed. 125 (62.5%) students lived in the countryside, while 74 (37.0%) students lived in the city, and 1(0.5%) respondents did not indicate their place of residence. Among all the students surveyed, the largest number were 17-year-olds 78 (39%), 16-year-olds 52 (26%), and 18-year-olds 44 (22%), while the smallest were 15-year-olds 15 (7.5%) and 19-year-olds 11 (5.5%) (table II).

Table I. Average age of study participants

Variable	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	200	16.92	1.00	15.00	19.00

Table II. Sociodemographic characteristics of the studied participants

Variable	Subgroup	N	%
Age	15	15	7.5
	16	52	26.0
	17	78	39.0
	18	44	22.0
	19	11	5.5
Gender	Female	139	69.5
	Male	61	30.5
Place of residence	City	74	37.0
	Countryside	125	62.5
	No answer	1	0.5

99 (49.5%) of the cohort indicated that the threshold for old age was between 75-89 years old, 78 (39.0%) of the respondents cited a range of 60-74 years old, 12 (6%) of the respondents specified over 90 years old, while 11 (5.5%) of the students indicated 49-59 years old. On the other hand, 119 (59.5%) of the surveyed students considered a person over 60 to be "elderly," 38 (19.0%) to be "middle-aged," 39 (19.5%) of the surveyed students specified that a person of this age was "hard to define," only 4 (2%) of the students considered a person "young." There were 122 (61.0%) students who did not live with their grandparents. Among those surveyed, 125 (62.5%) did not participate in any volunteer activities. They rated their relationship with their grandparents

as "very good" 97 (48.5%) of the respondents, "good" 81 (40.5%), "average" 19 (9.5%), while "bad" 2 (1%) of the respondents and "very bad" 1 (0.5%). Also, 127 (63.5%) of the students' attitudes towards the elderly in their surroundings indicated as "very kind." In their opinion, 111(55.5%) of the students surveyed believed that "elderly people were needed in the society" because "they had more knowledge and experience than young people," indicated 85(42.5%) of the youth surveyed, and 84(42.0%) of the students surveyed believed that "they sacrificed time for their grandchildren by taking care of them, so young people (parents of children) could work" (table III).

Table III. Opinions of students/young people on old age

Opinions	Subgroup	N	%
What do you think is the threshold of old age?	49-59	11	5.5
	60-74	78	39.0
	75-89	99	49.5
	>90	12	6.0
Is a person over the age of 60 considered?	Young	4	2.0
	Middle-aged	38	19.0
	Older	119	59.5
	Hard to say	39	19.5
Do you live together with your grandparents?	Yes	67	33.5
	No	122	61.0
	Grandparents are dead	11	5.5
What volunteer activities do you participate in at school or outside of school ?	Volunteering for children	20	10.0
	Volunteering for the elderly	3	1.5
	Volunteering for the disabled	1	0.5
	Volunteering for the benefit of the school	51	25.5
	I do not participate in any volunteer activities	125	62.5
How do you assess your relationship with your grandparents?	Very good	97	48.5
	Good	81	40.5
	Medium	19	9.5
	Bad	2	1.0
	Very bad	1	0.5

What is the attitude in your environment towards the elderly?	Very kind	127	63.5
	Indifferent	35	17.5
	Reluctant	6	3.0
	Hard to say	32	16.0
What is your opinion about elderly people?	Older people are needed in the society	111	55.5
	Older people are not needed, they are a burden on the society	6	3.0
	Older people smell bad	13	6.5
	Older people are well-groomed	2	1.0
	Older people are nicely dressed	1	0.5
	Older people are smiling	41	20.5
	Older people are sad	26	13.0
Why do you think elderly people are needed in the society?	They have more knowledge and experience than young people	85	42.5
	They devote time to their grandchildren by taking care of them, so young people (parents of children) can work	84	42.0
	They help their children and grandchildren financially	8	4.0
	They have more time to participate in charitable activities	6	3.0
	Hard to say why they are needed	17	8.5

Table IV. Kogan scale scores vs. sociodemographic variables

KAOP variable	Gender		Place of residence		Respondent group	
Subgroup	Female	Male	City	Countryside	2019	2023
N	139	61	74	125	100	100
Mean	122.19	122.59	122.57	122.07	122.61	122.02
Standard deviation	11.62	14.51	12.43	12.65	12.34	12.78
Standard error of the mean	.99	1.86	1.44	1.13	1.23	1.28
t	- .21		.27		.33	
df	198.00		197.00		198.00	
Significance (2-sided)	.838		.788		.740	
Difference of means	-.40		.50		.59	
Standard error of difference	1.93		1.84		1.78	

The mean of Kogan scale scores in the study group $m=122.32$, $sd=12.53$. Age, gender, place of residence, living with grandparents and relationship assessment in the study group are not related to Kogan scale scores (table IV).

Discussion

The attitudes of age-diverse social groups towards old age and aging in a society contribute to the formation of attitudes towards the elderly. A positive attitude among young people is most often formed in families where daily respect for the elderly, empathy, kindness, willingness to help and support are the norm. A negative attitude is most often a consequence of the cultivation of negative stereotypes of old age towards the formation of attitudes of gerontophobia and ageism. It manifests itself in the lack of understanding of old age and indifference to the elderly, negative attitudes and fear of old age and aging, or even their denial. The social problem is a

distanced, indifferent attitude evident in behavior devoid of sensitivity, empathy and the ability to help the elderly [5].

The purpose of the present study was to find out the factors affecting the attitudes of high school students towards the elderly and old age, and to verify attitudes based on the Kogan scale.

The results of our own research showed that high school students from the study group described a person over 60 as "elderly." The old age threshold range of 75-89 years was indicated by 49.5%; and the range of 60-74 years by 39.0% of the young respondents. Similar results, although differing in the scope of the age range regarding the threshold of old age, were obtained in her study by Pakos, where respondents indicated the threshold of old age in the range between 66 and 75 [6]. Czykier, in a study conducted among high school students, showed that youngsters between the ages of 16 and 19 were correctly able to indicate the period consi-

dered to be the beginning of old age falling within the 60-65 age range [7].

The results of our own research also showed that the attitude towards the elderly in the immediate environment was rated by 63.5% of the youth as very kind and marked by a very good relationship with their grandparents, despite the fact that they did not live with them and did not participate in any volunteer activities, including activities for the elderly. Among the young people surveyed, 55.5% also indicated the need for the presence of elderly people in the society, which was related, according to 42.5% of respondents, to the fact that elders had more knowledge and experience than younger people, and, according to 42.0% of respondents, to taking time to care for grandchildren so that the children's parents could work. Pakos, in a survey of high school and university students, obtained similar results to those of the present study, showing that 70.77% of both university students and high school students surveyed had a benevolent attitude towards the elderly, and more often women (84.5%) than men (50%) surveyed indicated the need for elderly people in the society. Also, 69.23% of university students and 58.82% of high school students valued the life experience in the elderly and 32.31% of both university students and high school students appreciated the leisure time spent by the elderly on caring for grandchildren [6]. The results of Czykier's study showed that the surveyed youths rated their relationships with the elderly as good, as evidenced by the youths' indicated frequent conversations and willingness to help the elderly. What they valued most in the elderly was experience (50.8% of responses) and life wisdom (40.5% of responses) [7].

Jursa et al. in their survey of junior high school students, high school students and university students obtained results similar to those of the present study and other authors. Positive associations related to old age in the opinion of the surveyed young people were associated with life experience (69.7%), life wisdom (67.2%) and time for grandchildren and family (53.3%). On the other hand, slightly different results were obtained regarding the authority of the elderly in the society, as high authority was indicated more often by junior high school students than by high school and university students. Young people's associations with old age in the study group were not significantly related to gender or place of residence. High authority of seniors in the society was indicated more often by males than females, while place of residence did not differentiate opinions on authority [8].

Positive attitudes of youth towards the elderly were also presented by results from studies conducted by

other authors. Good relations and positive attitudes towards the elderly and their grandparents were shown by Woźniak, where the attitudes of the surveyed youth were dependent on the level of empathy of the young [9].

Many other studies conducted among young people and the results obtained present positive attitudes and attitudes of young people towards the elderly and aging. Dąbska et al. present a relationship between positive attitudes towards the elderly and the simultaneous perception of the elderly as wise, happy, understanding and willing to help others. Also, age and type of university were significantly associated with old age among the young [10]. In a study by Bartkowiak et al. conducted among humanities and non-humanities students, it was observed that attitudes towards the elderly were generally positive, which was related to young people's experience of close relationships with the elderly in the family and their parents' positive attitudes towards the elderly [11]. Positive attitudes of student youth towards the elderly were also observed in Bieniak et al. research, where young people declared that the elderly were needed in the society, believed that they had a lot of life experience and knowledge and time for family and loved ones [12]. Also in Kowalewska's study among elementary school students, the declared attitudes towards the elderly were positive, mainly in the context of those closest to them in the family for their warm feelings, life wisdom and help in raising their grandchildren [13].

Our study found no differences between variables such as age, gender, place of residence, living with grandparents or relationship with them and attitudes towards the elderly according to the Kogan scale.

In a study conducted among medical students on attitudes towards the elderly on the Kogan scale, Milutinović et al. showed that students had a neutral attitude towards the elderly and indicated a significant relationship between knowledge and student attitudes, the more knowledge a student had regarding the elderly, the more positive attitudes he or she developed towards the elderly [14]. Also, similar results among students were obtained by Nierzewska and Gurba [15].

Quite varied attitudes of high school youth towards the elderly were presented by Wosik-Kowala, as on the one hand, most of the young people surveyed positively described the elderly as smiling, caring and friendly, while on the other hand, they were generally negative about the lives of seniors [16]. The varying attitudes of the young were also shown by Kanios in her study among high school and university students, and they concerned beliefs about the functioning of the elderly in the area of social welfare and health care, and were significantly related to the groups studied. Both high school and uni-

versity students were mostly not characterized by stereotypical beliefs regarding the elderly, but university students had more mature views regarding the elderly [17].

Many studies among young people also depicted the impact of stereotypes on the perceptions and attitudes of the young towards the elderly. A study conducted by Ma et al. among young Chinese, found that negative stereotypes in youth about old age and aging increased pro-social behavior towards elders [18]. Also, results from a study conducted in the Southwest of England among young people, where “positive stereotypes” more often indicated by young people contributed to more positive attitudes towards elders [19].

Young people’s attitudes towards the elderly are also influenced by contact with the elderly. A study conducted among university students confirmed that contact between young people and the elderly is important and influences emotional factors and attitudes/ stereotypes of the young, which are important for improving the ability to take the perspectives of the elderly and thus develop good intergenerational relationships [20]. Another study conducted among students at a London university also

found that the frequency and quality of contact influenced the attitudes of the young towards the elderly. Prolonged contact was more associated with positive attitudes towards the elderly [21].

Our own and other authors’ studies have shown important factors influencing and at the same time reinforcing positive attitudes of young people towards the aging society, which can significantly break the existing stereotypes and counteract gerontophobia and ageism.

Conclusions

1. Young people were able to correctly indicate the age that defines old age, at the same time they presented a positive attitude towards the elderly and their need in the society.
2. Age, gender, place of residence, living with grandparents, or evaluation of relations with them did not differentiate their attitudes towards the elderly.

Conflict of interest

None

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