

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34768/r1.2022.v482.06>

Mirosław Kowalski*

University of Zielona Góra, Poland

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2960-8258>

e-mail: m.kowalski@ipp.uz.zgora.pl

Sławomir Śliwa**

The Academy of Applied Sciences –

Academy of Management and Administration in Opole

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0465-0644>

e-mail: s.sliwa@poczta.wszia.opole.pl

**RESEARCH THOUGHTS ON THE EDUCATION
OF REACHING OLD AGE AND THE AGEING PROCESS**

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Keywords: old age education, old age, 1st and 2nd stage of education.

The theoretical and cognitive aim of the research was to find out the opinions and knowledge of teachers in the field of education about old age. The research was carried out among 106 teachers from primary schools in the Opolskie Voivodeship using the diagnostic survey method, the questionnaire technique.

***Mirosław Kowalski** – Ph.D. in social sciences in pedagogy, associate professor; scientific interests: hermeneutics and phenomenology, institutional educational processes; cooperation of environments for child development; contemporary educational thought, pedagogical ethics, law and pedagogical disputes; pedagogy of everyday life.

****Sławomir Śliwa** – Ph.D. in social sciences in pedagogy; scientific interests: prevention, upbringing, re-socialisation, professional competences of teachers.

MYŚLI BADAWCZE O/DLA EDUKACJI DO STAROŚCI I NAD PROCESEM STARZENIA SIĘ

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja do starości, starość, I i II etap edukacyjny.

Teoretycznym i poznawczym celem badań było poznanie opinii i wiedzy nauczycieli w zakresie edukacji o starości. Badania przeprowadzono wśród 106 nauczycieli szkół podstawowych województwa opolskiego metodą sondażu diagnostycznego, techniką ankiety. Jako narzędzie wykorzystano oryginalny kwestionariusz.

Introduction

The median is used as a measure of the advancement of the aging process, i.e. the age that one half of the population has not yet reached and the other half has already arrived at. According to Eurostat data, the middle age for the entire European Union in 2012 was 41.9 years. It means that, compared to other countries, Poland is still a relatively young country (the youngest demographically was the population of Ireland, for which the middle age was 35.5 years and the oldest – the population of Germany with a median almost 10 years higher) (Waligórska et al. 2014, p. 127). In January 2017, the median for the entire European Union was already 42.8 years, and for Poland – more than 40 years (*Stale wzrasta odsetek...* 2019). It is predicted that in Poland by 2050 the middle age will increase to 50.1 years for men and to 54.8 years for women (Waligórska 2014, p. 127). Additionally, the WHO is warning about the coexistence of many diseases in the elderly. According to the WHO, this is another challenge for the medical care of these people. Research conducted by the WHO shows that in Poland in 2010-2011 more than 20% of 60-year-olds and almost the same number of 70-year olds were affected by this phenomenon (WHO 2015, p. 75).

This situation also affects the labour market. According to Eurostat forecasts, by 2050 the number of people aged 65+ in EU countries will increase by about 70%, and the number of people of working age (15-64 years) will decrease by 12%. As a result, there will be only two economically active people per pensioner whilst currently there are four (Walkowska 2017).

Therefore, on the one hand, there is a need for old age education, which aims to shape attitudes towards the elderly, and, on the other hand, for old age education, which aims at shaping attitudes of youngsters from an early age, in particular about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle in their old age.

Borczyk and Wnuk (2012, p. 75) believe that in order for the elderly to age with dignity, young people need to develop an appropriate attitude towards them through organized educational tasks. Among the objectives of the proposed education to old age, they mention, among others:

- developing among children and adolescents the understanding of old age as a natural phase of development, a stage equal to others;
- presenting old age as a dynamic, active and diverse development period;
- changing attitudes dominated by distance or aversion to those characterized by understanding, kindness and respect;
- developing positive thinking about the old age of others, and in the long run also about one's own age;
- sharing maturity and life wisdom by the generation of seniors;
- stimulating mutual activity in various fields;
- taking care of the elderly in the family and outside;
- the impact of preventative measures to encourage a health promoting lifestyle.

As Aleksander Kamiński (1978) wrote earlier, preparing children for old age consists in helping people to acquire interests and aspirations, as well as appropriate skills and habits that will be useful in the implementation of a lifestyle conducive to extending youth and giving satisfaction in activity (Dzięgielewska 2009, p. 52).

According to Anna Rudnik (2017, p. 123-124), younger people should be provided with gerontological education aimed at developing appropriate attitudes towards old people and old age and overcoming the negative stereotype of old age in society. Gerontology education should be planned in such a way as to cover all activities aimed at shaping skills, attitudes and habits. It is the process of preparing a person for life in an ageing society, and thus for friendly communion and cooperation with old people.

Research methodology

The research was conducted in the period from September to October 2019 among primary school teachers from the Opolskie Voivodeship. The subject of the research was teachers' opinions about the education on the process of ageing and the theoretical and cognitive aim of the research was to check the opinions and knowledge of teachers in this field. The practical and implementation goal was to develop practical recommendations for the education of children and youths in schools.

The main problem is the question: What are primary school teachers' opinions and knowledge in the field of education about old age? Detailed problems: What are the forms of education about old age at school? Do teachers know about the concepts of aging and old age? What content of education about old age is provided to primary school students by teachers?

The paper uses the method of a diagnostic survey, the questionnaire technique. A questionnaire was used for the research. The questionnaire consisted of 41 statements with a 5-point Likert scale, 11 alternative questions and two open questions. At the end, there was a certificate.

Data analysis was developed using the PASW Statistics 18 statistical program and the Statistica version 13 package. The research group consisted of 106 teachers from primary schools in the Opolskie Voivodeship (85 women and 21 men). They were mostly employees with long work experience, as shown in table 1.

Table 1

The internship of the respondents

	Number	Percent	Percentage of valid responses	Cumulative Percentage
from 5 years old	28	26.4	26.4	26.4
from 6 to 15 years old	19	17.9	17.9	44.3
16-25 years old	25	23.6	23.6	67.9
over 25 years old	34	32.1	32.1	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: own research.

The largest age group was educators aged 45-55 (29.3%), then in the range of 36-45 (27.4%) and 26-35 (26.4%). The smallest number of people was up to 25 (7.5%) and over 56 (9.4%).

Exactly half of the respondents were certified teachers, 22.6% of them were contracted teachers, 14.2% of them were appointed teachers and 13.2% of the respondents were trainee teachers.

Almost half of the respondents were teachers from the city of Opole, as shown in table 2.

Table 2

The workplace of the respondents

	Number	Percent	Percentage of valid responses	Cumulative Percentage
village	6	5.7	5.7	5.7
city up to 10,000	5	4.7	4.7	10.4
city from 10,000 up to 50 thousand	33	31.1	31.1	41.5
city from 50,000 up to 100 thousand	12	11.3	11.3	52.8
city over 100 000	50	47.2	47.2	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	

Source: own research.

Results

As for the area of research related to the forms of education about old age at school, the respondents declared that they talk about the problems of old age in class (59.4% of “yes” answers). Moreover, 39.6% of teachers said that they raised these problems during educational lessons and 37.7% during extracurricular activities. Almost 1/3 of the respondents (31.1%) stated that the school organises projects related to education about old age. In addition, according to teachers, such projects are also implemented by non-governmental organisations (19.8% of “yes” answers) and territorial administration (16.0% of “yes” answers).

The second area of research concerned the teachers’ knowledge of the concept of ageing and old age. The research shows that the teaching staff are primarily familiar with the theory of activity. 68.9% of the respondents declared this. Slightly more than half of the respondents (50.9%) said they were familiar with the withdrawal theory. Fewer, 45.3%, declared that *they knew the concept of the life course* and 35.8% *the continuation theory*.

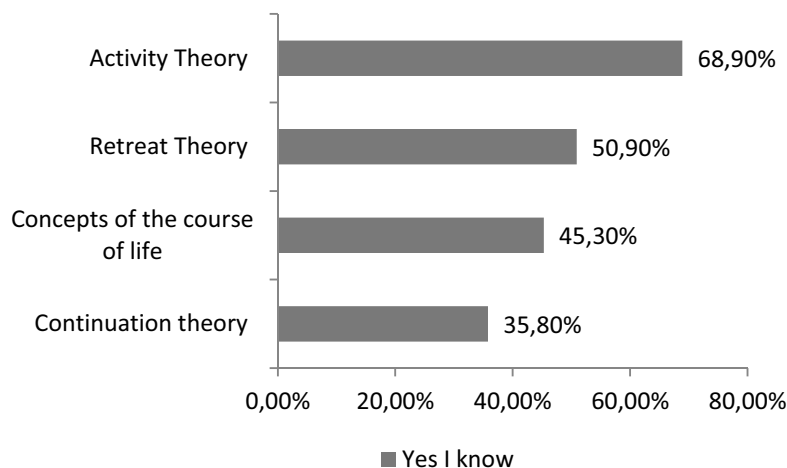


Chart 1. Knowledge of the respondents in the field of theories concerning the concept of ageing and old age.
Source: own research.

As far as the classes are concerned, the teachers declared that they particularly related to childhood (40.6% of the definitely yes answers, 38.7% probably yes, 10.4% I have no opinion, 7.5% probably not and 2.8% definitely not) and adolescence (46.2% of the answers definitely yes, 27.4% probably yes, 10.4% I have no opinion, 13.2% probably not and 2.8% definitely not). More than half of the respondents also indicated the period of early maturity (28.3% of the answers definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 16.0% I have no opinion, 22.6% probably not and 4.8% definitely not), half of the period of maturity (15.1% of the answers definitely yes, 34.9% probably yes, 15.0% I have no opinion, 26.5% probably not and 8.5% definitely not) and a little less than half of the answers to old age (7.5% of the answers definitely yes, 41.5% probably yes, 17.1% I have no opinion, 20.7% probably not and 13.2% definitely not). In turn, the period of late maturity was indicated by almost half of the respondents (3.8% of the answers definitely yes, 41.5% probably yes, 18.8% I have no opinion, 23.6% probably not and 12.3% definitely not).

In addition, teachers also indicated the preschool period (18.9% of the answers definitely yes, 27.4% probably yes, 20.3% I have no opinion, 22.6% probably not and 10.8% definitely not), baby (8.5% of the answers definitely yes, 23.6% probably yes, 20.5% I have no opinion, 34.0% probably not, 15.1% definitely not), although this period was indicated the least frequently.

Table 3

Phases of the human life cycle and the problems of classes

Phases of the human life cycle	definitely yes	probably yes	total
Infancy (0-2 years)	8.5%	23.6%	32.1%
Pre-school period (2-5 years)	18.9%	27.4%	46.3%
Childhood (5-12 years old)	40.6%	38.7%	79.3%
Growing up (12-17 years old)	46.2%	27.4%	73.6%
Early maturity (17-25 years)	28.3%	28.3%	56.6%
Maturity (25-50 years)	15.1%	34.9%	50.0%
Late maturity (50-75 years)	3.8%	41.5%	45.3%
Old age (over 75)	7.5%	41.5%	49.0%

Source: own research.

When it comes to the issues of classes related to the determinants of late adulthood and old age, the teaching staff primarily in their classes raised issues related to emphasising the need to help people in late adulthood and old age (50.0% of the answers definitely yes, 24.5% probably yes, 7.5% have no opinion, 12.3% probably not and 5.7% definitely not).

More than half of the respondents indicated the deteriorating physical fitness of people in late adulthood and old age (21.7% of the answers definitely yes, 36.8% probably yes, 18.9% I have no opinion, 14.1% probably not and 8.5% definitely not), health needs of people in late adulthood and old age (23.6% of the answers definitely yes and 34.0% probably yes), or the need to activate people in late adulthood and old age (24.5% of the answers definitely yes, 31.1% probably yes, 18.0% I have no opinion, 14.1% probably not and 10.5% definitely not).

The following determinants were discussed during the classes by teachers: physiological changes caused by age (10.4% of the answers definitely yes, 36.8% probably yes, 20.7% I have no opinion, 17.0% probably not and 15.1% definitely not), declining mental fitness (10.4% of the answers definitely yes, 35.9% probably yes, 23.6% I have no opinion, 20.6% probably not and 9.5% definitely not), biological causes of the aging process (15.1% of the answers definitely yes, 27.4% probably yes, 18.9% I have no opinion, 17.9% probably not and 20.7% definitely not) and the material needs of people in late adulthood and old age (12.3% of the answers definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 21.7% I have no opinion, 22.6% probably not and 15.1% definitely not).

Table 4

Determinants of late adulthood and old age and the problems of classes

Determinants of late adulthood and old age	definitely yes	probably yes	total
material needs of people in late adulthood and old age	12.3%	28.3%	40.6%
biological causes of the ageing process	15.1%	27.4%	42.5%
declining mental performance of people in late adulthood and old age	10.4%	35.8%	46.2%
age-related physiological changes	10.4%	36.8%	47.2%
the need to keep people active in late adulthood and old age	24.5%	31.1%	55.6%
health needs of people in late adulthood and old age	23.6%	34.0%	57.6%
declining physical fitness of people in late adulthood and old age	21.7%	36.8%	58.5%
the need to help people in late adulthood and old age	50.0%	24.5%	74.5%

Source: own research.

According to the surveyed staff, in grades 1-3, the dominant image of a person in late adulthood and old age is the image projected by such attributes of old age as: a rocking chair, good dinners, knitting, allotments, walks, warm slippers, memories, silence, seriousness, etc. (18.9% definitely yes, 35.0% probably yes, 27.4% I have no opinion, 13.2% probably not, 5.5% definitely not). In addition, students in grades 1-3, according to the respondents, perceive the elderly taking into account such positive character traits as: caring for the family, caring, wisdom, kindness, cheerfulness, patience, sensitivity, dignity, being a repository of knowledge, etc. (36.8% definitely yes, 35.8% probably yes, 19.8% I have no opinion, 3.8% definitely not and 3.8% definitely not). A large proportion of teachers also stated that the image of the elderly is inspired by an external appearance characterized by wrinkles, grey hair, missing teeth, false teeth, neglect, trembling hands, etc. (23.6% definitely yes, 38.7% probably yes, 24.5% have no opinion, 7.5% probably not and 5.7% definitely not).

Another image emerging from the minds of children is the image related to the dependence on lifestyle, i.e. retirement, stabilization, fatigue, rest, amount of free time, boredom, no further purpose in life, inactivity, watching

TV, hobbies, caring for grandchildren, etc. (6.6% definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 28.3% I have no opinion, 24.5% probably no, 12.3% definitely not).

Most of the respondents said that students in grades 1-3 perceive the elderly through the prism of the disease: sclerosis, deafness, hospital doctor, wheelchair, pain, etc. (7.6% definitely yes, 26.4% probably yes, 33.0% I have no opinion, 29.2% probably not, 3.8% definitely not), faith: increased interest in religion, prayer, rosary, devotion, superstition, church, pilgrimages etc. (6.6% definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 28.3% I have no opinion, 24.5% probably not, 12.3% definitely not), or death: death, end, panic, decline (4.7% definitely not, 19.8% probably not, 32.1% I have no opinion, 33.0% probably not, 10.4% definitely not) and the image related to negative character traits: irritability, snappiness, stubbornness, avarice, maliciousness, grouchiness, intolerance, conservatism, overprotection, etc. (7.5% definitely yes, 16.0% probably yes, 30.2% I have no opinion, 30.2% probably not, 16.1% definitely not).

According to teachers of grades 1-3, children associate old age the least with dependency: helplessness, old people's home, care, abandonment by children, helplessness, infirmity, need for help, sadness, etc. (8.5% definitely yes, 10.4% probably yes, 36.8% I have no opinion, 32.1% probably no, 12.2% definitely not).

The respondents saw things a bit differently when it came to the image of older people as seen by slightly older children from grades 4-8. First of all, the dominant image of a person in late adulthood and old age is the image created from positive character traits (17.9% definitely yes, 55.7% probably yes, 13.2% I have no opinion, 11.3% probably not and 1.9% definitely not), inspired by external appearance (34.9% definitely yes, 37.7% probably yes, 14.2% I have no opinion, 10.4% probably not and 2.8% definitely not) and dependent on lifestyle (18.9% definitely yes, 52.8% probably yes, 24.5% I have no opinion, 3.8% probably not).

Following on from this the image of the elderly perceived through their proclivity to have diseases of some sort was (18.9% definitely yes, 40.6% probably yes, 21.7% I have no opinion, 17.0% probably not and 1.9% definitely not), by the attributes of old age (19.8% definitely yes, 38.7% probably yes, 25.5% I have no opinion, 14.1% probably not, 1.9% definitely not), dominated by faith (19.8% definitely yes, 32.1% probably yes, 26.4% I have no opinion, 15.1% probably not and 6.6% definitely not) and designated by death (17.0% definitely yes, 33.0% probably yes, 24.5% I have no opinion, 18.0% probably not and 7.5% definitely not).

The fewest responses of the respondents were related to children's

perception of older people through the prism of dependence (16.0% definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 28.3% I have no opinion, 24.6% probably no, 2.8% definitely not)) and depicted by negative character traits (9.4% definitely not, 27.4% probably not, 25.5% I have no opinion, 33.0% probably not and 4.7% definitely not).

The vast majority of teachers were of the opinion that in primary school, teaching should include education about old age – 78.3% of the answers yes, 4.7% - no and 17.0% I have no opinion).

Then, the respondents were asked to propose what areas education should cover in old age. The respondents indicated that these should primarily be areas related to:

- shaping the habits of practicing sports, recreation in late adulthood and old age (56.6% definitely yes, 30.2% probably yes, 7.5% I have no opinion, 1.9% probably not and 3.8% definitely not);
- creating a positive image of a man in late adulthood and old age (68.0% definitely yes, 18.0% probably yes, 6.6% I have no opinion, 1.8% probably no, 5.6% definitely no);
- shaping an attitude of kindness towards people in late adulthood and old age (67.9% definitely yes, 17.9% probably yes, 7.5% I have no opinion, 1.9% probably not, 4.7% definitely no);
- acquiring social competences needed to coexist with people in late adulthood and old age (55.7% definitely yes, 29.2% probably yes, 8.5% I have no opinion, 1.9% probably no, 4.7% definitely no);
- acquiring social competences needed to care for people in late adulthood and old age (47.2% definitely yes, 36.8% probably yes, 10.4% I have no opinion, 2.8% probably not, 2.8% definitely no);
- shaping positive thinking about one's own old age (54.7% definitely yes, 29.2% probably yes, 8.5% I have no opinion, 3.8% probably no, 3.8% definitely not);
- improved knowledge of the model of active and healthy ageing (49.0% definitely yes, 34.0% probably yes, 9.4% I have no opinion, 3.8% probably not, 3.8% definitely no);
- preparing young people for their own late adulthood and old age (51.9% definitely yes, 28.3% probably yes, 13.2% I have no opinion, 3.8% probably not, 2.8% definitely no);
- indicating that old age is an individual and social capital (37.7% definitely yes, 40.6% probably yes, 13.2% I have no opinion, 1.9% probably no, 6.6% definitely not).

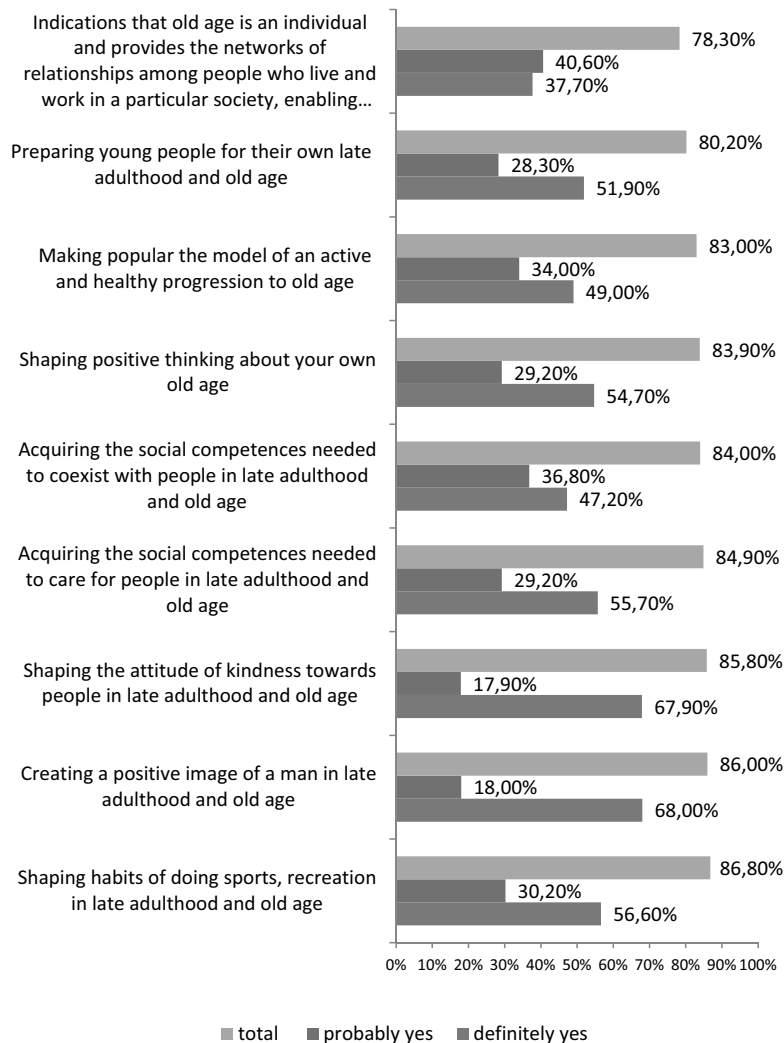


Chart 2. Dimensions of education about old age at school in the opinion of the respondents.

Source: own study.

Discussion

As can be seen from the above data, the issue of education about old age is raised primarily during lessons conducted by teachers and during educational lessons. This proves that teachers in their subjects raise the content related to this issue.

The research shows that teachers admit that, first of all, they know the theory of activity that describes adaptation to old age. This may be because the activity theory is one of the most popular theories. Increasingly, the active image of the senior citizen in society is being spoken of and shown. In turn, the theory of withdrawal known by the respondents may be perceived by them in the context of maintaining social balance and “making space available to younger people”.

It seems that teachers are most familiar with the theory of activity because trends in the approach to ageing in particular, emphasise this theory. In particular, the awareness of senior citizens regarding physical activity is increasing. This is confirmed by the conducted research, which shows that the interest in this form of activity of senior citizens is growing (Morgulec-Adamowicz, Rutkowska et al. 2010, p. 76; Kubińska, Pańczuk 2018, p. 75). They show that older people more and more often take up physical activity in various forms and for various reasons.

The analysis of the data showed that the teachers in the classroom refer in particular to the period of childhood and adolescence. Undoubtedly, it is related to the fact that they work with students of this age. A statistically significant difference related to the issues raised was noted here. In grades 1-3, teachers more often raised issues relating to childhood ($\chi^2 = 14.712$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.005$, $Phi = 0.373$), and teachers in grades 4-6 raised issues relating to the period of early maturity ($\chi^2 = 15.148$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.004$, $Phi = 0.385$).

This is due to the fact that most often the issues related to the period in which children are educated.

At a statistically significant level, a difference was also noticed in the responses relating to old age. Teachers of grades 1-3 more often raise this issue in class than the rest ($\chi^2 = 14.111$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.007$, $Phi = 0.372$). This may be the reason why it happens that children during this period still have a lot of contact with their grandparents. Very often at this stage, grandparents still take their grandchildren to school, and early childhood education teachers use the fact of close contact between students and grandparents in their classes.

During classes relating to old age, respondents declared that, first of all, in their classes, they raised issues relating to emphasizing the need to help people in late adulthood and old age. From this data it can be concluded that teachers, first of all, in their classes try to raise issues relating to exposing the message to children about the need to help senior citizens. As a result, they can sensitise young people to the needs of the elderly. Apart from these, the subject of classes oscillates around the physical fitness of

the elderly, their health needs or the needs related to the mobilisation of people in late adulthood and old age.

This applies to the fact that satisfactory ageing is associated with three factors: a low level of disability, independent physical and mental functioning and active involvement and interest in life. Although societies are becoming increasingly older, at the same time, they are better educated and healthier (Dragan 2011, p. 9).

According to the surveyed staff in grades 1-3, the dominant image of a person in late adulthood and old age in the eyes of children is the image projected by such attributes of old age as a rocking chair, good dinners, knitting, allotments, walks, warm slippers, memories, silence, seriousness, positive character traits, and outward appearance.

On the basis of factor analysis, two factors were distinguished among teachers in grades 1-3, which explain 80% of the variance, respectively – the image related to positive, typical features for older people and the second factor related to the negative perception of old age related to death, a sense of dependence and negative personal features of older people. In grades 4-8, according to teachers, students perceive the elderly through an image made of positive character traits, inspired by external appearance and dependent on lifestyle.

At the second stage of education, 2 similar factors were also distinguished that explain 70% of the variance: the factor relating to the negative perception of old age through the prism of dependence, death and negative character traits and the factor relating to the perception of old age through the prism of a positive image of people in old age.

In particular, attention should be paid to the factor of the so-called negative. In nationwide surveys, regardless of age and their own life situation, respondents, thinking about their old age, invariably fear disease, infirmity, and memory loss the most (73%). More than half (56%) are afraid of losing independence, being a burden to others, being dependent on other people, and a third of the respondents are concerned about poor living conditions, difficulties with subsistence (32%), as well as loneliness and loss of relatives (32%) (CBOS 2012). Additionally, attention should be paid to the processes related to labelling the elderly by the social environment in which they live – family, neighbours, local community or medical personnel. Such beliefs inherent in society affect old people in such a way that they are willing to withdraw from painful social interactions, as well as look for the motives of inappropriate behaviour of others in their own limited abilities and resources (Rudnik 2017, p. 115).

Therefore, as the respondents noted, education about old age should primarily include: shaping the habits of practicing sports, recreation in late adulthood and old age, creating a positive image of a person in late adulthood and old age, or shaping an attitude of kindness towards people in late adulthood and old age.

This is in line with the European Union guidelines for the physical activity of the elderly, the recommendations of the Public Health Agency of Canada, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which propose, inter alia, that (Mazurek et al. 2014, p. 74.): any physical activity is better than none, attention should be paid to the daily physical activity undertaken: to overcome the longest distances on foot, climbing stairs instead of using the elevator, etc., every elderly person should avoid prolonged periods of time spent in a sitting position. Additionally, it should be remembered that the support provided to seniors should be of an environmental and personal nature. It should be provided locally, at the place of residence of the person in need, taking into account their health condition and psychophysical abilities. The World Health Organization in particular drew attention to the fact that it is the social environment that allows the elderly to remain independent longer (Bodnar 2017, p. 5). As he emphasizes, in this period of life, support and help are very important, and above all, understanding, mindfulness, the ability to listen and respect for the elderly (Szczupał, Wiśniewska 2019, p. 39; Kowalski 2021, p. 83-99).

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