



## Elderly Peoples' Perception of Young People – A Preliminary Study

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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 overrepresentation 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).

**Table 1:** Study group description (Number)

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
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>140</b>

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% con-

sidered 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 ( $\chi^2$  test)

What are, in your opinion, the activities of young people?		SU3A		NHR	
		Female n (%)	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Male n (%)
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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.324		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.036		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.463		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.498		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.775		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.775		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.303		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.186		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.903		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.668		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.236		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.830		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.822		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.201		<i>P</i> = 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)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P</i> = 0.775		<i>P</i> = 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. Almost 23.0% answered "hard to say". Similar situation occurred in SU3A: 27.1% had contact with young people several times a month and 25.7% a dozen or so times a year. Responses to the question "What are, in your opinion, the activities of young people?" in the two study groups, by gender and by applying the chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) test are shown in Table 2.

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%).

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

Please indicate the most important behavior of young people towards the elderly.		SU3A		NHR	
		Female n (%)	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Male n (%)
<b>Positive feature</b>					
Kindness	yes	26 (44.1)	5 (45.5)	28 (62.2)	16 (64.0)
	no	33 (55.9)	6 (54.5)	17 (37.8)	9 (36.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.932</i>		<i>P = 0.883</i>	
Respect	yes	18 (30.5)	2 (18.2)	24 (53.3)	10 (40.0)
	no	41 (69.5)	9 (81.8)	21 (46.7)	15 (60.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.406</i>		<i>P = 0.285</i>	
Willingness to help	yes	27 (45.8)	8 (72.7)	30 (66.7)	19 (76.0)
	no	32 (54.2)	3 (27.3)	15 (33.3)	6 (24.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.101</i>		<i>P = 0.414</i>	
Understanding the needs	yes	7 (11.9)	4 (36.4)	19 (20.0)	2 (8.0)
	no	52 (88.1)	7 (63.6)	26 (80.0)	23 (92.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.040</i>		<i>P = 0.186</i>	
Trust	yes	12 (20.3)	3 (27.3)	2 (4.4)	4 (16.0)
	no	47 (79.7)	8 (72.7)	43 (95.6)	21 (84.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.607</i>		<i>P = 0.098</i>	
Honesty	yes	18 (30.5)	1 (9.1)	13 (28.9)	5 (20.0)
	no	41 (69.5)	10 (90.9)	32 (71.1)	20 (80.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.143</i>		<i>P = 0.415</i>	
Willingness to listen	yes	21 (35.6)	1 (9.1)	9 (20.0)	6 (24.0)
	no	38 (64.4)	10 (90.9)	36 (80.0)	19 (76.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.082</i>		<i>P = 0.696</i>	
Sense of bonding	yes	16 (27.1)	5 (45.5)	3 (6.7)	1 (4.0)
	no	43 (72.9)	6 (54.5)	42 (93.3)	24 (96.0)
	<i>P</i>	<i>P = 0.223</i>		<i>P = 0.645</i>	
<b>Negative Feature</b>					

Table 3: Cond....

<b>Disregard</b>	yes	29 (49.2)	8 (72.7)	27 (60.0)	16 (64.0)
	no	30 (50.8)	3 (27.3)	18 (40.0)	9 (36.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.150		<i>P</i> = 0.742
<b>Indifference</b>	yes	34 (57.6)	7 (63.6)	30 (66.7)	12 (48.0)
	no	25 (42.4)	4 (36.4)	15 (33.3)	13 (52.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.710		<i>P</i> = 0.127
<b>Agression</b>	yes	25 (42.4)	4 (36.4)	23 (51.1)	12 (48.0)
	no	34 (57.6)	7 (63.6)	22 (48.9)	13 (52.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.710		<i>P</i> = 0.803
<b>Humiliation</b>	yes	15 (25.4)	-	18 (40.0)	9 (36.0)
	no	44 (74.6)	11 (100.0)	27 (60.0)	16 (64.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.059		<i>P</i> = 0.741
<b>Lie</b>	yes	11 (18.6)	-	2 (6.7)	4 (16.0)
	no	48 (81.4)	11 (100.0)	43 (93.3)	21 (84.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.119		<i>P</i> = 0.212
<b>Lack of understanding</b>	yes	20 (33.9)	4 (36.4)	14 (31.1)	7 (28.0)
	no	39 (66.1)	7 (63.6)	31 (68.9)	18 (72.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.874		<i>P</i> = 0.786
<b>Criticism</b>	yes	10 (16.9)	3 (27.3)	5 (11.1)	3 (12.0)
	no	49 (83.1)	8 (72.7)	40 (88.9)	22 (88.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.419		<i>P</i> = 0.911
<b>Lack of sense of bonding</b>	yes	15 (25.4)	3 (27.3)	4 (8.9)	4 (16.0)
	no	44 (74.6)	8 (72.7)	41 (91.1)	21 (84.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.898		<i>P</i> = 0.370

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 ( $\chi^2$  test)

In what sense seniors - youth contact can be positive for an elderly person?		SU3A		NHR	
		Female n (%)	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Male n (%)
It rejuvenates	yes	46 (78.0)	9 (81.8)	33 (73.3)	17 (68.0)
	no	13 (22.0)	2 (18.2)	12 (26.7)	8 (32.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.775		<i>P</i> = 0.636
It helps fight the stereotype of a lower status of an elderly person	yes	21 (35.6)	4 (36.4)	26 (57.8)	11 (44.0)
	no	38 (64.4)	7 (63.6)	42,2% (19)	14 (56.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.961		<i>P</i> = 0.269
It allows older people to learn new skills	yes	55 (93.2)	10 (90.9)	35 (77.8)	21 (84.0)
	no	4 (6.8)	1 (9.1)	10 (22.2)	4 (16.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.785		<i>P</i> = 0.533
It allows older people to feel useful	yes	33 (55.9)	5 (45.5)	22 (48.9)	11 (44.0)
	no	26 (44.1)	6 (54.5)	23 (51.1)	14 (56.0)
	<i>P</i>		<i>P</i> = 0.522		<i>P</i> = 0.695

## 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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