

Subjective well-being in late adulthood: the views of elderly people and younger generation

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Like sex or skin colour, age stratification usually becomes a background for prejudices and discrimination. Common stereotypes depict old age as a time of poor health and functioning, a regression back to childhood (Ory et al., 2003, p.165), financial limitations, social surrounding and lifestyle changes etc. Although these are mostly myths, elderly people usually internalize them. In fact, even in the USA, less than 12% of the old-aged people declare experiencing a “successful ageing”, the rest claim that health problems, cognitive limitations, social isolation, inability to spend time interestingly are the factors making them unhappy (McLaughlin et al., 2010).

Some of the age stereotypes are produced by elderly people themselves (Schmidt, Boland, 1986). However, comparing to younger generations’ views of this life period, they are more diverse and complex, while youth describe ageing in more simple and dogmatic way. Giving some positive descriptions of elderly people (stressing on their wisdom, good communication with children (Hummert et al., 1994), spirituality (Kornadt, Rothermund, 2012)), they also associate them with many negative sides, mainly in the spheres of relationships with friends, financial aspects, physical and mental health (Kornadt, Rothermund, 2012). The mismatches in views of ageing among elderly and younger people may produce the feeling of misunderstanding, rejection, unhappiness among pensioners. Numerous researches have proved the influence of age stereotypes on elderly people’s physical health, cognitive abilities, self-attitude (Levy, Slade, Kasl, 2002, Ory et al., 2003, Dionigi, 2015). However, most of them are made in Western societies, and as stereotypes and prejudices are social phenomena, they strongly depend on the conditions they appeared in. Thus, it is important to find out some specific view of late adulthood among Ukrainians. This study focuses mainly on the conceptions of happiness in late adulthood among elderly people and younger generation.

Purpose. The aim of this research was to find out the differences in subjective well-being concepts of elderly people among younger and older respondents.

Design. To reach this aim, two studies were conducted. For Study 1, the group of elderly people (N = 260; 81 males, 179 females; age 60-88, Mean = 72.9, SD = 7.8) was asked to fill in the questionnaires on different aspects of subjective well-being (Satisfaction With Life Scale by Diener et al. (1985) and Affective Balance Scale by Bradburn (1969)). In Study 2 (N = 205; 60 males, 145 females; age 17-56, Mean = 24.4, SD = 4.5) there were two younger people groups. Group 1 ((N = 116) were those who closely interact with someone who is at the late adulthood period at the time of research (also matching the quality of the relationships from 1 to 10, the bigger the better), Group 2 ((N = 89) were those who did not. Both groups received the same questionnaires, with the task to answer the questions as they think their close elderly person (Group 1) or “the average elderly person” (Group 2) would respond.

Results. Subjective well-being is a complex phenomenon, but most of the researchers agree in consists of two main components which are cognitive, or contentment, life satisfaction, and affective, or emotional balance, the amount and intensity of positive and negative affects (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). On the results of comparative analysis with Mann-Whitney criterion, there was a significant difference in elderly people's and younger respondents' views of life satisfaction in late adulthood ($p < .05$). Namely, youth think that old-aged people are more satisfied with what they have in lives than those people really declare. Probably this may be explained by not understanding well all the difficulties that elderly people are facing in their lives by the younger generation. What is also meaningful is that the fact of close communication with the elderly people does not influence this result.

On the other hand, elderly people state that they experience both positive and negative emotions ($p < .05$) more often than youth think which means that younger people underestimate the intensity of elderly people's affects. Maybe, the view of older people as balanced and restrained is connected with the real improvement of emotional control in late adulthood (Charles & Carstensen, 2007). However, this may also be explained by the stereotype of wan and monotonous life of the elderly people which gives no reason for deep emotions.

Surprisingly, respondents of the Study 2 who do not have close relationships with elderly people were closer to the older people's results than Group 1 ($p < .05$). Probably, communication helps to create more positive image of late adulthood. This also may explain the fact that elderly people who live with someone of their family or relatives feel happier: they get not only support in these relationships but also maintain positive self-image. However, the quality of the relationships is an important factor here. On the results of the Spearman rank correlation analysis, positive links between this measure and life satisfaction ($r = .24$) and affective balance ($r = .42$) were found.

Limitations. Certain limitations of the current research should be noted. The future study should pay more attention to socio-demographic variables and its influence on the subjective well-being of elderly people and youth views. E.g., the comparative analysis of different age groups in the youth sample could be done if the number of respondents in each age group was comparable enough. For further research it would be more fruitful to add some qualitative not only quantitative methods of collecting data for deeper understanding of age stereotypes. Finally, some personality variables that may influence the level of subjective well-being components need to be controlled.

Practical value. The received results may be used for rethinking of the educational system in cases of teaching generations to understand each other better. Namely, showing the differences in youth and elderly people's views of life in late adulthood could be a good opportunity for building new, more realistic view of older people's lives among youth. Enclosing the differences in views may also be a good method for fighting against ageism. Moreover, this also may help to lower the level of fears of becoming old which usually appear in different younger cohorts, so the results may be used in psychological counseling.

Conclusions. The research demonstrated some differences in elderly people's subjective well-being and the views of happiness in late adulthood among younger generation. Generally, ageing is associated with some limitations which are not usually felt by old-aged people. On the other hand, some of the difficulties

of their age may be underestimated. Younger people tend to think that elderly people lived good life which is mostly close to what they dreamed about, received what they wanted; thus, youth build a cognitively positive view of life. However, youth evaluate elderly people's emotional attitudes towards life as less intense than old-aged people do, not necessarily positive or negative but not really filled with deep feelings. Elderly people themselves, instead, do not feel being so well-regulated emotionally and stress on much more intense positive and negative affects in their life evaluation.

Keywords: elderly people, younger generation, youth, stereotype, subjective well-being.

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