



## Young People's Perceptions of Old Age

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### Abstract

The article analyzes ideas about old age in young people. The world is undergoing demographic aging, which implies an increase in the number of disabled citizens. Old people differ in their biological, social and psychological characteristics. Young people imagine old age as a time of loss, illness, helplessness, when a person needs care and attention. They also celebrate acquisitions (wisdom, calmness, experience) and believe that old people should maintain the quality of life and interest in life.

**Keywords:** Young People; Perceptions; Old Age; Biological; Social and Psychological Characteristics

### Introduction

Improving living conditions in most countries, the development of information technology has raised a number of problematic issues for society. One of them is demographic aging. It implies an increase in the number of old people who can no longer work intensively. At the same time, life expectancy is increasing, the possibilities of modern medicine make it possible to maintain health. Society faces the task of determining the social function of old people in new conditions. It is important to know the attitude towards old age at different ages in order to plan social work and services for old people. Young people are the social group that only forms the attitude towards old age, but at the same time does not think about it. The age of aging seems very distant. Own aging is presented in rainbow tones ("I will be an active person who is interested in life"), with good health ("I will be a healthy person, because I look after myself"), in a prosperous environment ("I will live in a good country, among a large number of children and grandchildren"). On the other hand, those old people who are nearby often cause negative emotions.

In psychology, the attitude to social phenomena was studied in different directions. W. Tomas, F. Znanieski, G. W. Allport developed the concept of "social attitude" - a state of consciousness that regulates the behavior of an individual in certain conditions, as well as the experience of the meaning of a social object [1,2].

V. N. Myasishchev proposed the concept of "attitude", which is presented in the form of an integral system of conscious connections of the individual with the surrounding reality [3].

This concept has a number of similar features with social attitudes (awareness, mediation of social experience, emotionality, selectivity and focus on certain behavior). At the same time, the author highlights the emotional, cognitive and behavioral sides of the relationship. The emotional side characterizes the likes and dislikes of the individual to social objects, the cognitive side - perception and evaluation, the behavioral - the alleged behavior of the individual.

Psychologists also use the concept of "representation" - the image of an object or phenomenon, the attitude to it. Representations

underlie the attitudes and attitudes of the individual. Forming perceptions goes a long way. Initially, the child assimilates the information that is transmitted to him in the family, then in educational institutions (school, university), gradually adds his own experience. Then the individual assimilates the accepted standards of social community, adapts and builds his own interpretation of the world. Socialization is carried out in the process of interaction of the individual with various social systems (social groups, communities, institutions, organizations). Acquaintance with some of them (for example, the family) begins at birth. The individual learns to evaluate all social phenomena, to form an attitude towards them, to strengthen his own beliefs. In this, the mechanism of faith helps him. Adults transmit social beliefs and ideas to children, and young people gradually develop their own beliefs and ideas. This is how attitudes are formed to all phenomena of the surrounding world, including aging. This attitude is based on the idea of old age.

*J. Birren* believed that old age comes after 75 years, according to the periodization of D Bromley - after 65 years. In different countries, this age differently defines the time of retirement as the cessation of intensive work.

The concept of "aging" characterizes a complex of age-related changes (biological, social and psychological). It reflects a decrease in the viability of the organism and an increase in the verospeability of the onset of death [4] the process of the individual's removal from society [5] changes significant for the individual, giving him the opportunity to rethink, analyze her own life [6].

The aging process is complex. According to the biopsychosocial model of G. L. Engel [7], health and diseases are understood as a complex system that is determined by the influence of biological (sex, heredity, metabolism), psychological (characteristics of the emotional, motivational and personal sphere) and social (profession, marital status, income level, social status) factors [8].

The biological measurement of age-related development includes the peculiarity of the functioning of the physiological systems of the individual's body and his appearance. In turn, age-related changes in the body, which are expressed in a gradual change in appearance and in a decrease in the adaptive capabilities of the body due to the deterioration of the physiological systems (musculoskeletal, circulatory, respiratory, digestive, endocrine, integumentary, nervous and sexual), indicate biological aging [9].

An aging person is distinguished by certain external characteristics that reflect the deterioration of health and well-being.

The social dimension of age development reflects the nature of social relations. The social status and orientation of the social relations of the individual changes in connection with the manifestation of the biological signs of aging and retirement by age. This is social aging.

Old people are distinguished by invisibility in society, some social isolation, physical and mental insufficiency, lack of social roles.

There is social exclusion, the availability of social goods decreases. Society is focused on youth, activity, energy. Adulthood is becoming the most preferred age category. The rest of the age groups are trying to reach out, approach this period or delay its completion. Children want to grow up, teenagers begin to demonstrate adult patterns of behavior, wanting to feel older, old age is delayed, society offers various ways to rejuvenate [6].

Society has a predominantly negative attitude towards aging. Attention is focused on what a person loses, not on what he gains. Aging is characterized by a decrease in vital energy, conservatism. At the same time, it is associated with wisdom, kindness, care and spirituality. The old man is characterized as helpless, sick, lonely and weak. He has a slowdown in the processes of mental activity, he must be cared for. On the other hand, positive characteristics such as wisdom, experience, interpersonal competence are broadcast in relation to them [10]; while the elderly are considered the most stereotypical age group [11,12]. Society exaggerates age-related changes in the elderly person and attributes negative qualities to him.

In Western culture, words such as "old" and "elderly" are disappearing from everyday use. Their analogue is the phrase "a person at a respectable age". In Western countries, there is a predominantly positive image of aging. In Eastern culture, aging is accompanied by care and reverence [13].

Aging is being squeezed out of the public consciousness and replaced by eternal youth, ability to work and activity. Often, the fear of aging is instilled by society. Therefore, people strive in various ways to prolong youth: they take care of their health, play sports, use the achievements of medicine and plastic surgery, continue to

work intensively and use modern information technologies, receive additional education.

The psychological dimension of age development takes into account the characteristics of the personality and its experiences. At the same time, the feeling and experience of the personality of signs of age-related changes is defined as psychological aging.

The broadcast by society of a predominantly unattractive image has an impact on the self-esteem and self-perception of the individual. So, D. Kotter-Grühn and T. M. Hess in their study note that when negative stereotypes are activated, an elderly person feels younger than his calendar age [14].

Age-related changes are perceived by people differently. Also, their attitude may not meet the standards that exist in society. A person is afraid not of the symptoms of aging themselves (wrinkles, infirmity, poor health), but of the consequences to which they lead (helplessness, loneliness, decreased social contacts, loss of attractiveness in the eyes of others, loss of control over one's own life, hearing impairment and memorization processes) [9].

Old people may feel their own uselessness, loneliness, anxiety, weakening of intellectual abilities. The individual manifestation of the signs of aging is determined by objective and subjective factors. Objective factors include: lifestyle, habitat, nutrition, culture, level of education, profession. To the subjective - the personal characteristics of the individual himself, his activity, satisfaction, self-esteem, interests outside the work [15].

Analyzing the research on the problem has led us to a goal: to explore the perception of old age and old people in young people, which is necessary to understand the adjustment of these ideas.

**Materials and Methods**

The respondents in our study were young people - students of the Belarusian State University (Minsk, Belarus) aged 20-21 years. Number - 110 people. The research method is an essay on the topic "How I imagine old age". The method of analysis is content analysis, the statistical method is frequency analysis (the numbers in parentheses indicate the frequency of occurrence of categories in percentage (%)). To conduct a content analysis, categories (words and phrases) were identified, which respondents used most often, characterizing old age. Categories were divided into components

- Biological measurement of aging,
- The social dimension of aging,
- The psychological dimension of aging.

**Results and Discussion**

Analysis of the essay made it possible to identify generalized ideas of young people about old age, which they characterized when describing an old man, so there are many adjectives (what kind of person), verbs (what he does), nouns (what he has).

The biological measurement of old age was the most loaded factor, the frequency of use of words that reflect biological aging is 100%. These include:

- Appearance (wrinkles, gray hair, old skin) - 100%.
- Physiological changes (diseases, difficulty moving, poor hearing and vision) - 80%.
- Deterioration of mental activity (poor memory, attention and thinking) - 68.2%.

Other external biological characteristics of the old man were less common, but their number is greater (Table 1).

Category	Frequency of occurrence	
	Absolute numbers	%
Bald spot	16	14,5
Walks with a stick	16	14,5
Dim look	15	13,6
Sunken eyes	15	13,6
Bags under the eyes	14	12,7
Trembling gait	14	12,7
Heavy gait	10	9
Poor appetite	10	9
Bad sleep	10	9
Hunched Over Man	7	6,3
Bad smell	7	6,3
Coughs frequently	7	6,3
Gets tired quickly	5	4,5

**Table 1:** Frequency of occurrence of biological characteristics of old age.

The findings can be explained by the fact that biological changes are easily observable. Young people correlate these signs with stereotypical ideas about old age. They believe that all old people look a certain way, respectively, describe old age in similar categories. Many rely on images of their own grandparents (39%). Also, students note that their ideas about old age are formed on the basis of observation of other people (71%).

As can be seen, the biological dimension of the stratum is presented in young people in negative characteristics. Respondents indicated that it is very difficult to maintain mental and physical health in old age, for this you need to make a lot of effort

- take care of your health (attentive to health all the time, starting from childhood; treat diseases, if they appear) 45%.
- use the achievements of medicine (take vitamins, observe proper nutrition, move a lot, use biological supplements, use surgery) - 34%.
- Play sports - 15%.

At the same time, students note that these actions will help to preserve not only health, but also an appearance that will correspond not to the image of old age, but to the image of maturity.

The social dimension of old age is also quite broadly represented. Social life is manifested in the activity of the individual, the presence of a person's professional activities, occupations and hobbies. Lack of activity is easy to observe or attribute.

Young people believe that old age is associated

- with loneliness - 61%.
- with no classes - 55%.
- with a passive attitude to life - 55%.

Respondents note the need to care for and care for old people (63%), who often become a burden for relatives (23%).

Other social characteristics of the old man were less common, but their number is greater (Table 2).

These ideas are easy to explain from a psychological point of view. Young people have physical and psychological resources that provide an opportunity for great activity. This applies to the types

Category	Frequency of occurrence	
	Absolute numbers	%
He doesn't go anywhere	33	30
Communicates only with old people	20	18,2
Sits and does nothing	15	13,6
Only TV watches	8	7,3
Just sits and looks out the window.	8	7,3
No prospects	5	4,5
Nobody needs	5	4,5

**Table 2:** Frequency of occurrence of social characteristics of old age.

of activity and the time that can be spent on it. The resources of an old person are much poorer, so much more time and effort is spent on certain activities than by young people. Accordingly, young people believe that old people are more passive. In fact, this is not always the case. Old people spend more time on their classes in general.

The category of "social dimension of old age" is also dominated by negative characteristics. However, there are also positive ones

Grandparents help children care for grandchildren (36%)

- In old age, any work is interesting (29%),
- Devote a lot of time to hobbies (22.7%),
- Old people are respected (9%).

It is these positive characteristics that can make ideas about old age more favorable.

The psychological dimension of old age is reflected in the ideas of young people more diversely than the biological and social, since the psychological state of a person depends on many factors. In life, you can observe happy old people with a good psychological state, as well as unhappy people with a negative psychological state. This is determined by

- Health
- The presence/absence of a person's family/children/relatives who care for him,

- The affluence/financial situation that ensures the well-being of the person,
- Living conditions.

Imagine table 3, which reflects the frequency of occurrence of psychological characteristics of old age.

Category	Frequency of occurrence	
	Absolute numbers	%
Negative characteristics	34	30,9
Pitiful	31	28
Boring	30	27,3
He is afraid of everything	30	27,3
Doesn't want to know anything	22	20
Doesn't like young people	20	18,2
Capricious	17	15,5
Stupid as little kids	15	13,6
Does not want to develop and learn new things	11	10
Tired of life	9	8,2
Positive characteristics		
Wise	45	40,9
Experienced	42	38,2
Knows a lot	37	33,6
Kind	18	16,4
Forgives all	10	9
Loves children	8	7,3
Loves life	5	4,5

**Table 3:** Frequency of occurrence of psychological characteristics of old age.

The presented characteristics demonstrate both positive and negative psychological state of the old person. According to students, in old age, experience and wisdom are combined with the desire to teach everyone (boring) and unwillingness to learn new things. Note that the positive characteristics are presented more weightily. A large range of qualities is associated with the personal experience of a young person, his close relatives of old age. Students often referred in their essays to their own grandparents, describing old age.

### Conclusion

Analysis of young people's ideas about old age showed that all the characteristics fit into the biopsychosocial model, include biological, social and psychological qualities. The first and second are represented mainly by negative characteristics, which corresponds to social stereotypes about old age, psychological characteristics are more diverse, include both positive and negative qualities. Ideas about the psychological dimension of aging are related to a person's personal experience of communication with old people.

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