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## Subjective Well-being as a Result of the Realization of Projects of the Elderly's Involvement into the Social Life

Elena G. Leontyeva <sup>a</sup>, Tatiana V. Kalashnikova <sup>a\*</sup>, Natalia E. Danilova <sup>a</sup>,  
Inna V. Krakovetckaya <sup>b</sup>

\* Corresponding author: tvkalash@tpu.ru

<sup>a</sup>National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenin Avenue, 30, Tomsk, Russia, leog@mail.ru, +79138250164

<sup>b</sup>National Research Tomsk State University, Lenin Avenue, 36, Tomsk, Russia, inna\_krakov@mail.ru, +79138044122

### Abstract

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The paper analyses the subjective well-being and Successful Aging concepts. Unbiased analysis of such conditions is rather problematic by virtue of such facts as time-specific emotional state, climate of residence, culture, current developments and etc. The study concludes that there is no correlation between subjective well-being and economic health or objective socioeconomic factors. The subjective well-being is influenced in most cases by subjective factors: one's health status satisfaction, financial situation, the level of self-reliance or independence, family interaction and other human relations. But the main factor is the recognition of their mission by the elderly which places the faith and hope in their future modeling. Two categories of the elderly are sorted out for the study: the involved and noninvolved in social activity. The research concludes that any formal or informal activity of the elderly is one of the main factors of the successful aging. Pursuit of activities is uncharacteristic for noninvolved in social activity elderly people. The paper analyses the projects organized and implemented by not only the elderly people themselves but also state and social structures. Conducted analysis indicates that the level of subjective well-being of the two categories of the elderly is increasing as the result of these projects realization.

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**Keywords:** Subjective well-being, successful aging, involvement of the elderly, involvement in social life, projects, elderly.

### 1. Introduction

The population structure and life expectancy changed significantly during the XX century, especially in developed countries. The mean life span increases, the population health status improves which lead to the life expectancy of the elderly. The elderly dependency ratio reached 13% in Russia in 2010 according to the data of the Federal State Statistics Service; therefore Russia is attributed to the countries with the oldest population. The population ageing process is at a higher rate in Russia than in



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developed countries. The Russian total population increased by 25% between 1959 and 2002 but the elderly dependency ratio increased in 2.5 times (Safarova G., 2005). By 2040 this ratio is expected to rise by about 20% (Gavrolova N., Gavrilov L., 2009). Such changes entail serious consequences and challenges for society. The elderly quality of life is one of the main priorities of social policy in every country.

## **2. The goal**

The paper considers the elderly subjective wellbeing and the successful aging conceptions. The elderly are sorted out into two categories for the study: the involved and noninvolved in social activity. The paper analyses projects in different countries in order to identify their impact on the level of subjective well-being for both categories of elderly people.

## **3. Subjective wellbeing and successful aging**

Life and self-satisfaction, satisfaction by the world around and their place in it are meant by the subjective wellbeing (Stepanov S., 2011). This is also often referred to a harmonious human condition or state of happiness. As a rule, people in such a state give a positive charge or emotions to the people around. They create a positive space of love around themselves (Megre V., 2002). However, how many people can call themselves happy? Many researches suppose that the increase of the standard of well-being in a country leads to the happy people number increase (Pinquart M., Stsrensen S., 2000). Nevertheless, the University of California scientist called Richard Easterlin on the basis of numerous studies believes that "the growth of welfare does not make people happier with the curse of time" (Richard A. Easterlin, Robson Morgan, Malgorzata S., Fei W, 2012). The result of the survey conducted in China in 2012 can be a striking example of this claim. Results of the survey shows that only 6% consider themselves being happy, while 48% being unhappy (Richard A. Easterlin, Robson Morgan, Malgorzata S., Fei W, 2012). According to the data of Gallup statistics agency the top ten happiest countries in the world includes residents of Latin America: Paraguay, El Salvador, Venezuela, Ecuador and Costa Rica (Gallup US site of public opinion assessment, 2015). However, it is well known that GDP per capita in these countries is one of the lowest in the world. The results of these surveys clearly indicate that the state of subjective well-being is not related to the economic health. The senior citizens of the former communist countries have the lowest level of subjective well-being, even lower than the senior citizens of poor countries in Africa and Asia. The highest level of subjective well-being among the elderly have people from English-speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), as well people from the Protestant Europe. This result suggests that the level of a country modernization significantly affects the subjective well-being of the senior citizens. Low levels of subjective well-being of the senior citizens of the former communist countries can be the result of an underdeveloped social security system, large social stratification, social inequality and the lack of democracy. The concept of "successful aging" increasingly frequently appears in the literature in recent times. Researchers Rowe and Kahn introduced this concept for the first time (Rowe J., Kahn R., 1998). Their definition includes three criteria: low morbidity, high level of physical and mental capabilities and an active social life. It seems that these characteristics are well suited to be indicators for the

successful aging. However, first of all, this definition does not take into account the subjective perception of well-being, and secondly, suppose that if elderly people have some disease and cannot lead an active lifestyle, their aging is unsuccessful. This finding contradicts the results of empirical studies that show that many people have a high level of subjective well-being, in spite of the disease or other physical and social problems.

#### **4. Factors affecting the level of subjective well-being**

The study conducted in 65 countries (Inglehart R., 2002) shows that the gender influences the subjective well-being, but the output cannot be complete if the interaction between gender and age is not evaluated. For example, women at the age of up to 45 years declare a higher level of subjective well-being than men. However, after 45 years, the situation is changing, and that is already men who declare higher level of well-being. This gap increases with age. According to various studies, married people at all ages declare a higher level of subjective well-being than unmarried (Pinquart M., Soerensen S., 2001). In fact, this dependence is more complicated. Marital status is a less strong predictor of subjective well-being for people older than 65 years than for those who's age is between 40 and 64 years. The married elderly have higher levels of subjective well-being compared to widowed or divorced people and those who have never been married. The financial situation satisfaction is a stronger predictor than the level of income. It is important to note that the social ties as well as family and friends support are important components of the high level of subjective well-being in a later life. The level of support and of the person's importance in a family is more powerful predictor of the level of subjective well-being than the family status. The importance of leisure activities and involvement in social life also significantly increase the level of subjective well-being. Feel of control, a sense of self-reliance and independence have a stronger positive effect on the level of subjective well-being than the social support or family and friends' social ties.

#### **5. The involved and not involved in social life elderly**

According to the study results, people who are more satisfied with their lives, demonstrate behaviour that usually means a high satisfaction with the life level: they are more active, more often laugh and being in a good state of mind. Individual satisfaction evaluation also has a high correlation with the external one which comes from friends and family members, as well as medical health evaluation. The overwhelming majority of modern surveys tend to use a single direct question, "How satisfied are you with your life" or "how happy are you on the whole", and many researchers believe that one question evaluate the subjective well-being as good as the complex formulation. Laura Carstensen, the director of the Stanford Centre on Longevity, believes that people become happier with the age, feel greater life satisfaction and see the world in a more positive way (Carstensen L., 2015). Unfortunately, such statistics cannot be a reflection of the situation with the Russian elderly. According to the survey of Levada Center to the question "How often do you laugh?" it was noted that rarely laugh all pensioners. Young people under the age of 25 years laugh approximately 7 times a day, while the pensioners do it only 4 times a day, 28% of people aged from 18 to 24 years reported that they

laugh 10 times a day, compared to 15% over the age of 65 years. Besides, 21% of those who is older than 65 years admitted that they laugh less than once a day. Empirical observation for further analysis of the reasons for raising the level of subjective well-being during the ten years allows dividing elderly people into two categories:

Living a full life, i.e. involved in social life;

Tired of life, i.e. uninvolved in social life.

For many elderly people in Russia it happens when the retirement age comes: 55 years for women and 60 years for men. This is the most difficult year for the elderly, when it is necessary to rebuild and start a new life, to model the new lifestyle. As a rule, the implementation of any activity is not typical for the second category of people (uninvolved in social life), for those who crossed themselves out of life after retirement. The difference between these two groups is not much if we compare them by the following characteristics: economic well-being, presence / absence of close relatives and health. These people differ only by self-awareness and aspiration or lack of aspiration for the subjective well-being. What is the driving force of the first category of people who are constantly striving for subjective well-being, often without being aware of this? Authors suppose that it is the internal love for everything in the world (animated and inanimate) – that's the constant of people's happiness. In this context, it is a continuous feeling of love for the nature, the Earth, and etc.

## **6. Projects for the involved in social life elderly**

There is a program called «Golden Age» for active elderly people in one Tomsk Company. The title of the program characterize the age of retired people. The Golden Age is the life span when the elderly should finally feel happy. This program provides further creative and intellectual development of the company's retirees. It solves a lot of issues. The first and the most important one is making the company's former employees feel that company needs and care about them. School "Golden Age" is a meeting place for like-minded people, who have something in common, professional success, achievements or interesting cases during the professional life. Such meetings enable them to be in the know of current company's vents not by the grapevine but at first hand. The possibility of a consultation with a psychologist and a lawyer helps to get rid of fears and problems that are so intrusive in the autumn of life. Yoga helps to be in good physical shape and a course in healthy nutrition in later years returns to the real values and traditions of the multinational Russian cuisine. One of the favourite subjects is the course «Flower and vegetable garden", where pensioners share seeds, seedlings, as well as the secrets of growing roots.

## **7. Projects for the uninvolved in social life elderly people**

For elderly people, who are not involved in social life, it is not sufficiently to be involved in aimed at the first category projects. This category primarily needs some changes in consciousness. That is quite difficult task to be carried out in the urban environment. The project called "Forest cottage" is suggested to help Russian pensioners not to lose the meaning of life. The project requires the creation of the retiree's settlements where they can live in a harmony with the nature, and to direct their energy to creativeness and creation, doing gardening. A person who works on the ground has no time for

boredom or discouragement. He is always busy by implementing some dreams: growing a new breed of cucumber, planting a tree, reading the new information about the planting. Preparing for the garden season starts in winter and ends late in autumn. People in these villages are not only getting rid of depression, but also become healthier and are capable of great endurance (Foundation A., 2015). The difference between the settlement and the nursing home is that the elderly are fully dependent in a nursing home and become helpless dependents. While elderly people in the villages take good care of themselves, their houses and gardens. At the same time, regular communication with others helps retirees to stay in society which is a very important thing for a person. Thus, the elderly stay active every day, keep in touch with other retirees and village workers, and very quickly moves into the first category of the elderly who are involved in social life.

## **8. Project analysis results**

The study involves elderly people aged from 60 to 82 years living in the city of Tomsk. 119 of the elderly are interviewed in the total. This group includes 43 men and 76 women. The average age of respondents is 73 years. According to the survey results, these are elderly people who are involved in social life and consider themselves happy. After retirement, they motivate themselves to participate in the social life. There are many ways of doing that. The following projects can be perceived as aimed at the further self-development of the elderly:

1. The extension of the professional activity time or change of the professional activity
2. The younger generation upbringing (grandchildren or great-grandchildren)
3. Nursing (the sick, lonely, disabled)
4. The self-education (acquiring new knowledge, develop new skills)
5. New hobbies (painting, writing poetry, singing, sports, etc.)
6. Gardening, horticulture
7. Self-discovery (the search for the truth and meaning of life)

It is worth to note that all these projects are organized and implemented on the elderly's initiative in Russia, but not on the initiative of any government or public institutions. Comparing the similar projects in Spain, the active participation of state and social structures in the organization of the leisure-time should be noted. The Association of the elderly takes the leading part among the most active public institutions. The most interesting projects which are carried out by the state and public organizations are the following:

1. Organization of the circle of cutting, sewing and knitting for the elderly in the same department of the shopping centre
2. Organization of a fashion show with the participation of the elderly
3. The creation of parks for the elderly with sports ground
4. Clubs at: mountaineering, sport bike, Nordic walking, hiking
5. Organization of the restaurant for the elderly
6. Seasonal tourist tours organization (e.g. cruise the Mediterranean)

All these projects are aimed at involving elderly people in social life through rehabilitation, acquisition of new knowledge and skills, new skills development.

## 9. Conclusion

The study shows: the older generation cannot be described only in terms of disease and poverty. For many people, the old age is a time of self-realization, interesting leisure-time, new relationships with people and emotional experiences. At the initial stage, elderly people may be in different groups: the involved and uninvolved in social life. However the realization of projects aimed at awareness of the meaning of life at the old age and at activities bringing satisfaction and joy, leads to an increase in the state of subjective well-being of both categories of elderly people. If the elderly are able to manage their lives, then appear the desire to live actively, interesting and happy for a long time. Society should understand these needs and provide opportunities for their realization. Only in this case people may say about the successful aging.

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