

Iwona Mandrzejewska-Smól\*

## **EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY OF SENIOR CITIZENS IN TERMS OF THEIR OPERATION IN THE SOCIETY**

For years already the senior citizens' operation in the society is one of the most important aspects of social policy. It is mostly due to the fact that more and more attention is given to the needs of the senior citizens, a social group increasing in number each year. The OAPs' problems, so far treated marginally, are more and more important for the operation of the entire society, both in Poland and in many other European countries. The year 2012 was a breakthrough for Poland; it was announced the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Then not only the authorities' policy and interest in senior citizens' functioning of in the society but also the number of applicable publications, research and social initiatives were clearly increasing. However, there are still many barriers which, in fact, limit independent and unassisted social participation of that age group.

This article covers the problem of the operation of senior citizens in the society and the importance of their educational activity. It also shows selected results of the survey performed among senior citizens in the kujawsko-pomorskie province on adaptability to old age, especially taking up educational and occupational activity.

### **Problems of the the senior citizens' operation in the society**

Despite unambiguous and more and more visible demographic changes, the contemporary society in our country is not yet adequately prepared and completely open to the problems of the OAPs. Emerging solutions, although more and more numerous, still do not meet the needs of the older generation; mostly mobility barriers, due to an incompatibility of the means of public transport with the requirements of senior citizens, language of the media and form of conveying information, addressed mostly to the young generation, to mention just a few. Besides, a continuous development of state-of-the art technologies and technical solutions makes an on-going skills development necessary to catch up with their everyday implementation, which is not only true for the older generation. Similarly a low effectiveness of health care services and

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\* **Iwona Mandrzejewska-Smól**, PhD – The Kazimierz Wielki University, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Institute of Pedagogy, Bydgoszcz, Poland; e-mail: iwonman@ukw.edu.pl.

nursing institutions in terms of preventive health care, medical treatment and support given to the OAPs does not help their everyday functioning.

An essential problem to the senior citizens' social participation is also a lack of a comprehensive senior citizens policy. There are still few comprehensive and coordinated actions taken by public and non-public entities, at the central level and all the country's administrative division levels. As a result, using the senior citizens' social capital is abandoned. Institutions responsible for OAPs activating actions which would make them adapted to old age, both in Poland and in Europe, are also missing (Raclaw et al. 2011, p. 288). Those aspects can substantially trigger a negative perception of the reality in many elderly people and their relations with the youth. Disturbed relations of the senior citizens with the young generation pose a serious problem in terms of adaptation to old age, due to not only a completely different perspective of the reality resulting from a different development stage of those social groups but also from the old age stereotypes operating in the society which pose a major barrier to social participation of the OAPs.

In general, stereotypes are defined as simplified generalizations which concern a group of people which involve attributing identical characteristics, compliant with a person's prejudice, to member of those groups (Aronson 2001, p. 281). Such generalizations can assume a form of beliefs both positive and negative, referred to as prejudice (Trempała 2015, p. 34). Negative beliefs make the people in today's society uncritically favouring and preaching the youth, an OAP is frequently considered clumsy, unproductive, incapable of independent and self-reliant life. There is a tendency to highlighting unfavourable changes in senior citizens' operation in the society; conservatism, resistance to changes, fossilised habits or a tendency to patronising the youth, to mention just a few. Additionally, even the beliefs positive in nature which emphasise the fact that an elderly person requires a special attentiveness and special treatment, in many cases, result in making those people seem infantile and in limiting their independence and self-reliance in actions and functioning (Finogenow 2013, p. 98).

Contemporary literature points still to many other factors and conditions affecting the way the senior citizens operate in the society. Their analysis would be only another attempt at systematization, however, one cannot disregard the most important ones; condition and the economic and financial position of the senior citizens. It is obvious that good health and fitness as well as financial independence as well as good housing conditions considerably facilitate quite self-reliant and independent functioning of the elderly in the society. One should also consider the seniors' education background, gender, or the place of residence which essentially determine the role and position of an individual in the society. Neither should the role of the family and the closest community showing support in such a difficult and completely changed life situation

be underestimated. However, what is most crucial is the attitude, initiative, type of individual actions as well as the nature of activity or its lack among people facing unavoidable perspective of deteriorating changes in all the fields of life.

### **Activity as the key indicator of positive ageing and adaptation to old age**

Contemporary research and analyses of the old age is dominated by a commitment to showing specific traits of that stage of life which would allow for determining the properties common for that age. It aims at identifying changes which could facilitate understanding the nature of body ageing. Among gerontology specialists two approaches dominate. The first one highlights all the ageing difficulties, as a result of deteriorating changes in the body; various symptoms of the body becoming weaker and the vital functions – being limited. The proponents of emphasising the potential of that stage of life claim the old age is a fully valuable period, compliant with the needs of the individual, also not depriving the individual of a chance for further development (Semków 2008, pp. 125-126). Such approach is considerably related to positive ageing, mostly referring to “individual experience of good mood, morale, life satisfaction and successful ageing” (Halicki 2010, p. 43).

One of the key expressions of the quality of life and adaptation to the old age is the person's activity. It is expressed both in physical and mental dimension. A vibrant activity is a symptom of health and individual development, whereas a limited activity – ageing and regression (Semków 2008, p. 128).

Human activity gains special importance with years as it conditions not only satisfying all the needs of an individual but also playing social roles, functioning in a group and in the society (Szatur-Jaworska et al. 2006, pp. 161-162). With that in mind, over the recent years the aspect of active ageing has been rooted in the processes and phenomena more and more transforming our reality. Active ageing is a political concept which assumes facilitating the seniors' possibly longest effective functioning in the society. One of the key initiators promoting and popularising new active ageing solutions is the World Health Organization. It shows e.g. the necessity of efforts to help the elderly stay self-reliant and independent, mostly by increasing the number, in that age group, of people with a positive life quality and actively participating in family, local, social and cultural, economic and political life of the entire society (Active Ageing 2002, pp. 12-16).

Active ageing is not a new idea as it is grounded in the theories which, analysing human ageing factors, at the same time point to possibilities and methods of getting adapted to that stage of life. In that context the theory of activity, one of the most

common ageing concepts, is gaining special importance. In general, the theory considers the human ageing process as a social phenomenon and activity – as a condition of individual's emotional equilibrium, referring to it as a value appreciated in the society. It assumes taking up activity according to the individual's possibilities, as a measure of its positive image in their own eyes and in the eyes of the community (Halicki 2010, p. 14).

Undoubtedly the assumptions of the concept of active ageing and the activity theory are extremely important for self-reliant and independent functioning of the individual in the society. Interestingly, however, the foundations of those concepts do not always comply with the desires of the elderly. It means that the idea of activity postulates satisfying the needs the people might not feel. It is thus considering the scope and kind of the forms of activity offered, especially for the people with a low level of demand for activation.

### **Educational activity in terms of independent senior citizens' functioning in the society**

One of the many forms of activity, facilitating the seniors' independent functioning in the society, is educational activity. It is considered one of the most essential forms of activity taken up by the man at each stage of development. It is also of great importance at old age, especially in terms of getting adapted to that period in life and considerably affecting its quality.

Theories indicating that learning in OAPs is not possible due to their limited aptitude are no longer valid. The period of old age is no longer only related to regression and the analysis involves both limitations related to that period in life and development potential which emerges at that time (Finogenow 2013, p. 95). It is also essential that regressive changes at old age are not total since losses are rather gradual and selective. Besides, next to natural losses, at that stage of life also progressive changes occur. e.g. qualitatively new ways of thinkings today related to wisdom, new learning or memorizing strategies, not found in earlier development periods and which facilitate successful functioning of the senior citizens (Trempała 2015, p. 43).

Taking up educational activities by OAPs is considered a necessity since education is becoming indispensable to understand today's world transformations. A need of catching up with new technologies development frequently makes the senior citizens start learning. However, not always do they have to launch their educational activity because they have to. Frequently their engagement in that kind of activity is motivated by a desire of a valuable use of free time. It is also important for them to satisfy their cognitive curiosity as well as following own interests which at earlier stages of life could not be adequately and sufficiently realised (Frąckowiak 2007, pp. 195-205).

The educational activity of the senior citizens in many cases assumes an institutional form, mostly by participation in classes held by Universities of the Third Age. It is a question of the elderly participating in various fields of social life and thus, social involvement. Seniors taking up such activity are evidence that the man at old age can stay active intellectually, mentally and physically as well as develop their interests and maintain positive and multilateral social contacts (Finogonow 2013, p. 101).

Senior education is not only limited to participation in organised forms of education. Many acquire knowledge from life situations, own experience and experience of others; it is also getting to know and understanding oneself and others as well as the world around. A non-institutional nature of educational activity facilitates launching activity by an individual focused on individual development. It also allows for an independent selection of the educational form, adequate to their predispositions and interests (Roguska 2009, p. 77). Such activity also allows for creating patterns of positive ageing and enhances a lifestyle encouraging education as a value which makes life richer (Czerniawska 1998, p. 13).

### **Selected aspects of educational activity in the senior citizens in view of the results of own research**

The above theoretical findings are not a novelty, however they are to indicate a crucial importance of seniors' educational activity for their independent operation in the society. For that reason it is worth, in the context of such considerations, referring to the results of research of OAPs' educational and occupational activity in the kujawsko-pomorskie province.

The analyses presented are only a fragment of research performed by the author of this study in 2010-2013 and at the turn of 2014/2015 using a survey questionnaire on "Ageing people's occupational and educational activity". The analyses involved processing the opinions of 978 individuals (including 597 women and 381 men), retired and at pre-retirement age, from the period of five years before retirement. The research was an attempt at diagnosing selected problems in terms of adaptation to old age, especially senior citizens taking up educational and occupational activity. It covered e.g. performing the analyses of activities started by those persons in various periods of life, the respondents' evaluation of the need of senior citizens' taking a job, declarations of their own employment or motivations for their educational activity.

In the context of this study, analyses of the forms of activity taken up by persons when retiring seem most interesting. To make the research results more detailed, an

additional indicator was introduced; gender, and to get a general picture of the problem, an analytical breakdown was made and provided in Table 1<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1. Forms of activity taken up by the respondents after retirement; analytical study

FORMS OF ACTIVITY	WOMEN N = 597		MEN N = 381		TOTAL N = 978	
	Selection mean	Selection rank	Selection mean	Selection rank	Selection mean	Selection rank
Household and family activity	3.66	I	3.52	I	<b>3.60</b>	<b>I</b>
Cultural activity	2.37	IV	2.00	VI	<b>2.23</b>	<b>V</b>
Occupational activity	1.68	VI	2.15	V	<b>1.86</b>	<b>VI</b>
Social activity	2.35	V	2.16	IV	<b>2.27</b>	<b>IV</b>
Educational activity	1.61	VII	1.53	VII	<b>1.58</b>	<b>VII</b>
Religious activity	3.09	II	2.75	II	<b>2.96</b>	<b>II</b>
Recreational activity	2.50	III	2.62	III	<b>2.55</b>	<b>III</b>
Other activity: hobby	1,01	VIII	1.05	VIII	<b>1.03</b>	<b>VIII</b>
SELECTION MEANS	2.28	–	2.22	–	2.26	–

Source: own study.

The analysis of the data provided in the table shows that the household-family activity was the dominant form of activity taken up by the respondents after retirement. That response reached the highest rank, with the total average – 3.60 and it falls within the formula of certain positive response “yes”. The second rank, with the total average – 2.96 for religious activity, an expression of uncertain positive response “rather yes”. In general, the third rank was allocated to recreational activity, with the total average of 2.55, also falling within the formula of uncertain positive response “rather yes”.

The lowest rank (VII), of all proposed, was given to educational activity, with total average – 1.58, falling within the formula of uncertain negative response “rather not”. The data presented confirms the tendency to participation in further education when retired in a low number of people only. The elite nature of educational activity among senior citizens was already reported by CBOS in 2009. Of all the OAPs studied, only 3.0% declared a continuation of further education and acquiring further qualifications,

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the analysis of the material collected, the quantitative calculations were performed. The OAPs were asked to determine their dominant forms of activity after retirement by valuation. The responses were respectively multiplied: “yes” times 4, “rather yes” times 3, “rather not” times 2 and “no” times 1. The scores were divided by the number of respondents and the selection mean value was received. For that mean value, in turn, the following evaluation intervals were applied: up to 1.50 – a certain negative response – no; from 1.51 to 2.50 – uncertain negative response – rather not; from 2.51 to 3.50 – uncertain positive response – rather yes; above 3.50 – certain positive response – yes.

2.0% of them participated in interesting classes (memory exercises, IT workshops, university of the third age), while 4.0% started learning a foreign language (Kolbowska 2009, p. 11).

Making an attempt at interpreting such situation, one should consider what can mostly be the reason for such little interest of the OAPs in educational activity. Those theoretical considerations show that one of the main factors of taking any activity is the senior citizens' economic and financial position. It is thus worth noting, in that context, the relationship between the economic and financial conditions of the respondents and the type of activity started. Calculations were made with the chi-squared test and presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship between economic and financial conditions and activities taken up by the respondents after retirement

FORMS OF ACTIVITY	Good conditions (N = 360)		Satisfactory conditions (N = 459)		Unsatisfactory conditions (N = 159)		Total (N = 978)		p**
	n	%*	n	%*	n	%*	n	%*	
Household and family activity	333	92.5%	441	96.1%	132	83.0%	906	92.6%	p < 0.001
Cultural activity	144	40.0%	186	40.5%	36	22.6%	366	37.4%	p < 0.001
Occupational activity	99	27.5%	105	22.9%	39	24.5%	243	24.8%	p = 0.313
Social activity	168	46.7%	195	42.5%	54	34.0%	417	42.6%	p = 0.026
Educational activity	45	12.5%	90	19.6%	6	3.8%	141	14.4%	p < 0.001
Religious education	246	68.3%	312	68.0%	123	77.4%	681	69.6%	p = 0.068
Recreational activity	216	60.0%	279	60.8%	60	37.7%	555	56.7%	p < 0.001
Other activity	9	2.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	9	0.9%	p < 0.001

\* Percentages do not add to 100 since it was a multiple-choice question.

\*\* Chi-squared test.

The research results demonstrate that values p are below 0.05 for 6 forms of activity and so taking up those forms of activity after retirement depends significantly on economic and financial conditions. Household-family, cultural, educational and recreational activities are most often started by individuals with satisfactory, and least frequently – individuals with unsatisfactory economic and financial conditions.

An essential addition to those findings can be provided by the research results on forms of spending free time by the senior respondents, see Table 3<sup>2</sup>.

The data provided in the table showS that both women and men spend time mostly on listening to the radio and watching TV programmes. That answer received the

<sup>2</sup> Calculations were made in a similar way as in Table 1.

Table 3. Ways of spending free time by the senior respondents; analytical breakdown

FORMS OF SPENDING FREE TIME	WOMEN N = 597		MEN N = 81		TOTAL N = 978	
	Selection mean	Selection rank	Selection mean	Selection rank	Selection mean	Selection rank
I still have a job; the same job I had before	1.56	IX	1.97	VI	1.72	VII
I still have a job; it is a new job	1.21	XV	1.45	X	1.30	XIII
I follow my interests	2.28	V	2.40	IV	2.33	V
I follow amateur passions which are, at the same time, a source of additional income	1.29	XIII	1.42	XI	1.34	XII
I take up social and cultural activities	1.66	VIII	1.39	XII	1.55	IX
I spend my time mostly with family	3.28	II	3.07	II	3.20	II
I read a lot	2.81	IV	2.27	V	2.60	IV
I listen to the radio, watch TV programmes	3.56	I	3.48	I	3.53	I
I take part in lectures, readings in clubs, cultural centres or universities of the third age	1.47	XI	1.29	XIII	1.40	XI
I started learning to supplement my educational background	1.18	XVI	1.15	XVI	1.17	XVI
I started learning for pleasure	1.27	XIV	1.24	XIV	1.25	XIV, XV
I practise sports	1.69	VII	1.64	VIII	1.67	VIII
I do sightseeing and tourism	1.70	VI	1.87	VII	1.77	VI
I spend time on creative, artistic activity	1.30	XII	1.19	XV	1.25	XIV, XV
I enjoy going to clubs and enjoy entertainment	1.52	X	1.46	IX	1.50	X
I look after my health	3.20	III	2.98	III	3.11	III
Others	1.04	XVII	1.00	XVII	1.03	XVII
SELECTION MEANS	1.88	–	1.78	–	1.87	–

Source: own study.

highest rank, with the total average – 3.53, the second highest rank – the senior citizens spending time mostly with family (total average – 3.20), and the third highest rank – they look after their health (total average – 3.11).

Interestingly, the forms of educational activity proposed to the respondents received the lowest values. And so: participation in lectures, readings held in clubs, cultural centres or universities of the third age received rank XI (total average – 1.40); taking up learning for pleasure – rank XIV and XV (total average – 1.25); and starting to learn to supplement their educational background – rank XVI (total average – 1.17). All those average values are an expression of certain negative response “no”. It means that the OAPs definitely reject the proposed forms of spending free time which refer to educational activity. They firstly prefer to listen to the radio and watch TV programmes, secondly spend time with family and thirdly to look after their health.

The research results correlate with earlier findings showing the greatest popularity of receptive activity in that age group as mostly watching TV, listening to the radio and reading newspapers and magazines, most frequently at home (Halicka and Halicki 2002, pp. 189-218). Similarly the CBOS findings cited earlier confirm that tendency, indicating that as much as 92.0% of the senior respondents declared that they watched television, 79.0% listened to the radio and music and 75.0% read books, magazines and newspapers (Kolbowska 2009, p. 11).

One could consider various reasons of the situation and claim that OAPs' condition and economic and financial situation are determining factors. However, one should note that the stereotypes, held in the Polish society and related to the view that at specific age starting educational activity is actually pointless, can considerably limit such activity. Many of today's OAPs present a passive attitude to life, developed throughout their occupational activity which coincided with functioning in the socialist society (Halicka, Kramkowska 2012, p. 34).

However, one can state that the population studied is a group of people with the so-called undervalued needs in terms of educational activation who consciously chose social withdrawal, have a limited potential and feel no need of activation. Although our results are only fragmentary and concern only the people from the kujawsko-pomorskie province, they can provide an important signal that not all the OAPs must feel the need of activation in a given area and that they often willingly give up taking up educational actions.

Considering a recently popular idea of active ageing, one should think whether a will of senior citizens' activation itself is sufficient. In that context one should consider the economic and financial position, condition of the senior citizens, as well as preferences, needs and possibilities of those people. It is worth thinking who, in what way and to what extent could stimulate the OAPs and encourage their educational activity. One

should also ponder on the importance of making not only those people but also the entire society aware of how important such activity is in terms of overcoming barriers and difficulties in self-reliant and independent functioning in the society at old age, and thus, for the sense of being useful, life satisfaction and self-esteem.

## Recapitulation

The considerations presented in this article are an attempt at demonstrating the importance of OAPs starting educational activity in terms of their adaptation to old age and self-reliant functioning in the society. It is related to a dynamically progressing phenomenon of ageing societies which makes positive ageing and life quality at old age more and more essential. One of the indicators of man's life quality is launching activity and, in turn, one of the most essential forms of individual's activities at each stage of development is educational activity. Educational activity, as an important determinant of maintaining contacts with the world around and the society, is a springboard for a satisfying participation of the senior citizens in social life (Wawrzyniak 2008, p. 279).

Such theoretical findings, however, were not confirmed in the author's research results showing little interest of the senior citizens in starting educational activity. Thus it seems that the considerations exhaust neither the scope of the research problem nor the method of finding the answers. One can, however, draw an important conclusion that providing the OAPs with an opportunity to perform a activity is not sufficient as such actions should be personalised to meet their needs and potential. An active and empathetic approach to the person is also essential.

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**SUMMARY:** This article covers the problem of the operation of senior citizens in the society and the importance of their educational activity. It also shows selected results of the survey performed among senior citizens in the kujawsko-pomorskie province on adaptability to old age, especially taking up educational and occupational activity. The analyses presented are only a fragment of research performed by the author of this study in 2010-2013 and at the turn of 2014/2015 using a survey questionnaire on "Ageing people's occupational and educational activity".

As the results show, theoretical findings, however, were not confirmed in the author's. One can, however, draw an important conclusion that providing the OAPs with an opportunity to perform a activity is not sufficient as such actions should be personalised to meet their needs and potential.

**KEYWORDS:** activating the senior citizens, educational activity, participation in social life.

#### **PODEJMOWANIE AKTYWNOŚCI EDUKACYJNEJ PRZEZ OSOBY W WIEKU SENIORALNYM W KONTEKŚCIE ICH FUNKCJONOWANIA W SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE**

**STRESZCZENIE:** Artykuł poświęcony został problemom funkcjonowania osób starszych w społeczeństwie i znaczeniu aktywności edukacyjnej w ich pokonywaniu. Ukazane zostały również wybrane wyniki badań sondażowych, przeprowadzonych wśród osób w wieku senioralnym w województwie kujawsko-pomorskim, dotyczące problematyki przystosowania do starości, a w szczególności podejmowania przez te osoby aktywności edukacyjnej i zawodowej. Zaprezentowane analizy stanowią jedynie fragment badań, przeprowadzonych przez autorkę tego opracowania w latach 2010-2013 oraz

na przełomie roku 2014/2015 za pomocą kwestionariusza ankiety na temat: „Aktywność zawodowa i edukacyjna ludzi starzejących się”.

W rezultacie ustalenia o charakterze teoretycznym nie uzyskały potwierdzenia w zaprezentowanych wynikach badań własnych autorki opracowania. Można jednak wysnuć ważny wniosek, że samo umożliwienie ludziom starszym podejmowania jakiegokolwiek rodzaju aktywności nie wystarczy, działania bowiem w tym zakresie powinny zostać zindywidualizowane w kontekście ich potrzeb oraz możliwości.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** aktywizacja osób starszych, aktywność edukacyjna, uczestnictwo w życiu społecznym.