

TIES 2020

International conference «Trends and innovations in economic studies»

THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS OF ELDERLY IN THE CONTEXT OF SUBJECTIVE INEQUALITY

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Abstract

The relevance of the study is determined by the need to identify the level and extent of loneliness among elderly as a factor that affecting their real and potential access to social resources. The feeling of loneliness in this case is an indicator of a disturbed balance arising as a result of experiencing events in a person's life, which entered the retirement age and left the field of professional and labor employment. The empirical basis for the study was the sociological survey of elderly people, conducted in May 2017, as well as the accumulated sociological database based on a previous sociological survey (May 2015). The object of the study is men and women over 50 years old, living in cities and rural areas of the Tomsk region of the Russian Federation. The sample size was 400 people. The sample was compiled taking into account the gender, age and settlement distribution of the population of the city of Tomsk and the Tomsk region. Research methods applied: a phenomenological approach in which life circumstances are considered through subjectively significant experiences; methods of sociological survey and mathematical analysis. Results of the study: the correspondence of the existing stereotypes with the real state was checked, the emotional experiences of the elderly were revealed, correlations of the state of loneliness with variables were established: with the assessment of life prospects and with the emotional mood.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Loneliness, subjective inequality, life chances, stereotypes about elderly.



1. Introduction

The psycho-emotional space of a person's life, reflecting his attitude to what is happening to him, with his relatives, with his own life, is an important indicator of the degree of satisfaction with what a person has, how he relates to this, whether he considers it fair. The emotional status of a person, fixed in a constructive or destructive mood, is an indicator of the level of experience of subjective inequality.

The emotional status of elderly is inextricably linked with the intensity of their involvement in various areas of life, with the ability to access the numerous resources available in these areas for a full, healthy and quality life, which minimizes some types of risks. Such minimization is associated with the ability to influence the prevention of negative consequences for one's own life, including having the right to inform about methods of preventing them and minimizing the negative consequences of manifestation.

The methodology developed in the work for modeling loneliness among older people is based on the developments of the Husserl life world, which allows us to connect everyday practices (external factor) and attitudes (internal factor). The approach used is consistent with Erickson's framework for developing psychosocial stages of personality development, according to which loneliness in old age is due to socio-economic processes that affect human emotions.

Scientists, Sadler, and Johnson (1989), whose work is devoted to the nature of loneliness, revealed an understanding of the world of life in the aspect of subjective experience and judged the world of life as a conscious, organized network that sets universal boundaries, within which what is happening becomes significant. Similarly, according to the views of Sadler and Johnson (1989), the provisions under consideration are consistent with the participation of a person in life practices, such as physiological, psychological, economic and social.

The main properties and criteria of emotional status are the personification of the person present and potential for a quality life, subjectively determining, ultimately, the degree of satisfaction with life, what it happens to, what it has, owns it (Klemasheva, Ivankina, & Zeremskaya, 2016). In this aspect of applying and understanding emotional status is an indicator of how older people adapt to changes in social reality.

During each period of life, the age of a person accumulates positive and negative aspects which characterize capabilities and a specificity of the given age and underlie the formation of stigma concerning this age. In these terms, the old age is also characterized by definite attitudes forming among men and women associated, in the first place, with their idea of the old age as a survival time, low energy level, insenscence, sadness, inferiority, losses. Such an attitude to this period of life equates the old age to singlehood and becomes a stereotyped attitude with regard to their simultaneous coming which means to remain in isolation and loneliness.

2. Problem Statement

In this work, we analyze the following stereotyped attitudes:

- a majority of older persons suffer from loneliness;
- older persons are unhappy people permanently suffering and worrying;
- older persons have no prospects and have a negative perception of the future.

In order to reconstruct the structural elements of the singlehood phenomenon in the base module of the sociological research, consider the following parameters:

1. A degree of social modes of singlehood (isolation, abandonment) and incidence of a feeling of isolation among elderly people.
2. Interpersonal communication and social activity.
3. Life satisfaction as a whole.
4. Perception of the future.
5. Emotional sufferings.
6. Perception of him/herself every day in various spheres of life.

For elderly, a feeling of loneliness is an indicator of a disturbed balance arising as a result of experiencing events occurring in a person's life, which entered the period of retirement age and is released from the sphere of permanent professional, labor employment.

Some of researchers (Barysheva, Ivankina, Monastyrny, & Klemasheva, 2019; Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009; Cramer, Ofosu, & Barry, 2000; Kryukova & Ronch, 2012; Osin & Leont'ev, 2013) emphasize the inner structuredness identified by measurements allowing a person to percept him/herself every day in various spheres of life. According to early sources (Clark & Anderson, 1989; Puzanova, 2009; Russell, 1989; Sermat, 1989; Weiss, 1989), the singlehood is accompanied by such typical symptoms as negative emotions, pessimism, feeling of isolation and abandonment, expectation of the worst, meaninglessness of life, and unattractiveness to other people.

In this work we use the revised UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978; Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) to measure loneliness in our sociological research.

3. Research Questions

First of all, to confirm or deny the stereotyped attitude to singlehood among elderly people, let us measure the degree of incidence of their feeling of loneliness. During a seven-day inquiry, several questions were raised to record emotional sufferings and their stability based on the experience which has formed the self-perception of a person as a lonely person.

To the question: "How often have you experienced feelings of loneliness during the last week?" the answers in 2017 of the respondents were distributed as follows: 59.0 % of respondents never feel loneliness, 28.8 % feel lonely less of the time, 5.4 % of experience this feeling all the time and 6.8 % respondents feel themselves lonely all the time. Overall, the percentage of those who feel lonely was 12.2 %.

The sociological research carried out in 2015 conducted among people of retirement age in Tomsk and the Tomsk region shows that 6 % of respondents often felt lonely. Almost never felt lonely 51.2 %, 31.4 % of respondents sometimes experienced this feeling. As you can see, comparing the data obtained for 2 years of research, the number of respondents experiencing loneliness does not increase, and, on the contrary, the number of those who almost never experience loneliness increased in 2017 compared to 2015 by 8 %.

We suggested respondents to evaluate their feeling of loneliness and identify their self-perception as a lonely person using a ten-point scale. As a result, 5.8 % of respondents found themselves very lonely (1 point) and 40.5 % said they were not lonely at all (10 points). Between 1 and 3 points were 12.8 % of respondents (lonely persons) and 67.5 % of respondents evaluated their feeling of loneliness between 7 and 10 points, i.e. considered themselves as not lonely persons.

The obtained results coincide with answering to the claim “I don’t feel lonely” using the UCLA scale. Thus, 72 % of respondents do not feel lonely, 14 % experience this feeling rarely, and 14 % never feel lonely.

Along with a straight question about the experienced feeling of loneliness, social modes of singlehood such as isolation and abandonment are evaluated. The measurements show that only 2 % of respondents often experience this state, 86.8 % never or almost never experience isolation from other people, 4.2 % often feel abandonment and 82.6 % do not feel abandonment. Only 6 % of respondents feel that people who close to them are not with them, whereas 43.5 % of respondents never experience such a feeling.

Therefore, the percentage of elderly people permanently experiencing a feeling of loneliness is extremely low. In this case, could they be unhappy? Can they experience trouble or bad spirits?

In order to confirm or dispel the stigma that identifies unhappiness, suffering and worrying of elderly people, we focused on feelings they experience more often.

Investigations show that the emotional state of respondents is associated with their positive feelings. A positive attitude is characteristic of most of respondents. Thus, 71.8 % of respondents accept the life as it is and take the best from the life. Such an adaptive approach confirms a good social adaptation of elderly people who are able to overcome adversity without shocks and despair.

19.8 % of respondents are worried and uncertain about their future and 3.3 % await for their future with fear and despair. However, 75 % of respondents hold a much more positive opinion: 45 % of them perceive the future in a quiet manner, without particular expectations, and 30 % of them – with hope and optimism.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study revealed the attitude of an elderly person to different parameters of life and the influence of involvement in life practices on the formation of a stable and permanent sense of loneliness.

5. Research Methods

Research methods applied: a phenomenological approach in which life circumstances are considered through subjectively significant experiences; methods of sociological survey and mathematical analysis.

6. Findings

The association between quality of life assessment and emotional mood was reduced and is presented in Table 1.

Table 01. The respondent's assessment of the material situation in terms of their attitude to life (in percent, by groups)

Assessment of the material status	All respondents	Respondents with an affirmative view of the future	Respondents feeling fear and despair
I can buy whatever I want	2	2,5	-
I can buy a lot of things, but I can't afford big purchases	23	30,5	16
I can buy new clothes and shoes	32	32	16
I spend all my income buying food	41	34	58
I don't have enough money to buy food	2	1	10,5

The connection between the perception of the well-being of respondents and their attitude was revealed, in particular, in assessing the material situation, the decisive role is played not by the income level, but by the person's mood. This dependence is reflected in the diagram (Figure 1).

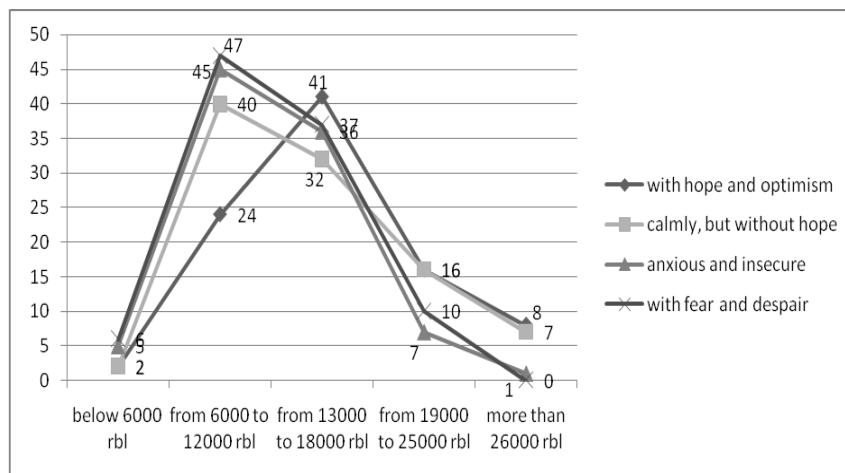


Figure 01. Correlation between respondents' real income and their attitude to life (in percent, by groups)

Based on the dependencies reflected in the graph, it follows that a different attitude - positive and destructive, is characteristic of all groups selected according to the income level criterion. Slight deviations in mood were found in the group of respondents with an income level of less than 6 thousand rubles. Positive and pessimistic respondents are almost equivalently represented in the group, which did not support the hypothesis that low-income respondents are more pessimistic in comparison with other groups according to the material security criterion. Significant differences in mood estimates are observed in the group of respondents with a low income level (from 6 thousand rubles to 12 thousand rubles). In this cluster, desperate respondents are almost twice as many (47% and 24%) as confident in their future.

In the course of the study a significant interrelation is highlighted between experiencing a feeling of loneliness and optimism. The more a person is isolated, the less he or she is optimistic. And vice versa,

the less a person is isolated, the more he or she is optimistic. Among elderly people who don't consider themselves lonely, 69 % are optimistic and only 9 % are pessimistic about life. The percentage of optimists and pessimists among those who regard themselves as very lonely persons, is 12.5 and 31 %, respectively. A feeling of sadness is experienced by 24.6 % of elderly people who positively perceive their future. Among them only 1.7 % experience a permanent feeling of sadness. In a sample of people in the older age group negatively perceiving the future, 63.2 % of respondents feel sadness, including 15.8 % of those who experience this feeling permanently.

According to the 2015 sociological research carried that 22.7 % of respondents often experienced happiness during the year, and 55 % in 2017. Sometimes 51.7 % of respondents felt happy in 2015, and 26.5 % in 2017. The total number of happy older people who participated in the survey in 2017 was 94.2 % in 2015, it was 74.4 %. It is significant that only 5.8 % of respondents (in 2015 – 12.4 %) of the total number of survey participants experience happiness very rarely.

Our investigations include the identification of the significant interrelation between the degree of happiness and the state of loneliness among elderly people. A happy person does not feel lonely. Very happy and absolutely not alone are 67.1 % of respondents. Among those who consider themselves to be lonely (5.8 %), 40 % of respondents are very unhappy and 7.9 % are very happy. There are no very unhappy persons among 40.5 % of not lonely respondents, whereas the percentage of very happy respondents among them is 67.1 %.

The results obtained in 2015 and 2017 match those obtained earlier by other researchers. According to (Carstensen & Charles, 1998; Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000), old age is characterized by the considerable improvement in the emotion regulation, increased satisfaction with interpersonal communication and maintenance of psychological wellbeing.

In the structure of emotional sufferings of elderly people, the assessment of achieved results, prospects and a view to the effective future is of great importance. It is found that 27 % of respondents are satisfied and 56.8 % are rather satisfied with their life, while 2.3 and 9.8 % of respondents are fully dissatisfied and rather not satisfied, respectively 4.3 % of respondents are at a loss for assessment of satisfaction with their life.

The activity and responsibility of an elderly person are important conditions for his emotional wellbeing. Nearly half of the respondents (45 %) make their independent solutions and 47% of respondents are considered from the point of view of their close relatives. Almost no one applies to the opinion of friends and social services, only 4 % of the total number of respondents apply to the Council of friends, 0.5 % to the social protection service and 0.5 % found it difficult to determine their opinion.

In relation to a feeling of loneliness, we do not find substantial differences between those elderly people who live with somebody and those who do not. Only in the age group of 76–80 years ($p < 0,05$), significant differences are observed. In other age groups, there are no serious differences concerning living conditions of elderly people.

7. Conclusion

The results obtained during the surveys allow us to conclude that older adults are dominated by a constructive emotional attitude. Feeling of loneliness and frustration are typical for a small number of

participants. Older adults perceive themselves as individuals with a perspective and a positive future. The level of subjective inequality is low for the examined group.

Acknowledgments

The study was supported by the Russian Science Foundation (project №19-18-00282).

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