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OLDER PEOPLE, AGEING AND OLD AGE
IN THE LIGHT OF SOME PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS
IN POLAND

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a UN report, in 2010 life expectancy was 69 years – 67 for men and 71 for women. The world population equalled 6.896 billion in the middle of 2010, and people aged above 65 years constituted 8% of the statistical population¹. Ageing of the population is a phenomenon commonly known in all regions of the world, although it mostly affects Europe and North America. It is estimated that in 2030, approximately 12% of all Europeans will reach the age of 75 years and more, and 7% will exceed the age of 80 years. In 2000, within 25 countries of the world having the highest percentage of people aged 65 years and above, 24 were European countries². In addition, by approximately 2050, the number of people aged 60+ in highly developed countries will exceed the number of children and young people aged up to 15 years for the first time in history³. The population of Poland, similarly

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¹ *Demographic Yearbook 2009-2010*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York 2011.

² K. KINSELLA, V.A. VELKOFF, *The Demographics of Aging*, „Aging Clinical Experimental Research”, 2001/14, p. 160.

³ *World Population Policies 2009*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, United Nations, New York 2010.

to the majority of countries in Europe, is characterised by an ageing process that keeps progressing. In the end of 2014, the population of Poland was 38.5 million, with 8,5 million people aged 60 years and above (more than 22%). Between 1989 – 2014, the number of older people increased by over 2.9 million, and the highest increase – by 1 million – was observed in 60-64 year olds. The share of people aged 60 years and above in the general population increased by 7.5 percentage point, from 14.7% in 1989 to 22.2% in 2014⁴. A prognosis prepared by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (CSO) in 2008, based on the results of the census from 2002, posited that there would be an increase in the percentage of people aged above 65 years to 18.4% in 2020 and 23.8% in 2035⁵.

Demographers describe this process as *double ageing*. At first, one observes an increase in the general number of older people in a society; then, within this group, there is an increase in the number of people of advanced aged, who are called *old-old*. No wonder that, in the context of the current demographic situation, researchers tend to focus more on issues affecting older people⁶. Old age, older people⁷ and ageing are the categories of research that could be found in different areas of science. Geriatric medicine focuses on biological and physiological processes of ageing and on diseases related to the late life of humans. The development of this area of medicine seems to be highly relevant, since the life expectancy in developed countries has systematically increased. Old age is therefore a biological phenomenon and a part of the human life cycle, whereas ageing is a process of a progressive dysfunction of the bodily functions in an organism⁸. From the psycho-gerontological point of view, aspects related to one's personality and the old age seem to be particularly interesting, for example: ability to cope mentally with old age, quality of life, creativity or resourcefulness of older people. According to the Levinson's theory of life stages, old age is one of life's phases: next to the period of youth (*early adult transition*) and adulthood. The former is a time of learning, acquiring

⁴ *Ludność w wieku 60+. Struktura demograficzna i zdrowie*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2016, p. 3.

⁵ *Raport na temat sytuacji osób starszych w Polsce*, Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych 2012, p. 26.

⁶ Z. SZAROTA, *Gerontologia społeczna i oświatowa. Zarys problematyki*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo UP 2004, p. 9-12; E. DUBAS, *Starość znana i nieznaną – wybrane refleksje nad współczesną starością*, „Rocznik Andragogiczny”, 2013/20, p. 136-137.

⁷ In the literature, one can often see the following terminology: older people, old, ageing people (to highlight the progressing character of the phenomenon of ageing). The expression *old* is unavoidably linked to negative thoughts and emotions. *Old* makes us think about someone useless, redundant, not worthy our attention. A comparative form, *older*, is more acceptable. *Old* can also be replaced by *senior*, a representative of „Third Age” generation. In this work, different expressions have been used, though they are considered synonyms.

⁸ T.B. KIRKWOOD, *Human Senescence*, „Bioessays”, 1996/18(12), p. 1009-1016.

experience; the latter is a period of implementing the acquired knowledge, whereas old age is a phase of regress⁹. Phillipson and Baars link the theory of ageing with the development of the relationship between the ageing population and public as well as economic institutions¹⁰. In geronto-pedagogics (geragogics), the most important issues are related to the accurate adaptation to the old age.

The geragogists conduct various research to optimise the conditions of active life and education of ageing people. Beauvoir has distinguished two phases of old age: in the first one, older people are functionally independent and economically dependent (so-called Third Age), in the second they are independent both functionally and economically (so-called Fourth Age)¹¹. The issues linked to old age and ageing are analysed within (and at the interface of) different areas and – as rightly noticed by Bromley – the cooperation between life and social sciences in this scientific area is needed¹². This aspect has been also underlined by World Health Organisation (WHO) in a recently launched document presenting multisectoral strategy for the healthy ageing¹³.

Demographic changes and their social consequences are also within the interest of sociologists (gerontosociology, social gerontology). In this context, scientists conduct research related to the life conditions and needs of older people, they analyse the role of the older generation in the society and the attitude towards older people and old age. It is the socio-gerontological perspective that constitutes the framework of this article.

This paper is based on the analysis of surveys led by CSO and CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center). The article consists of four parts. In the first one, the outcomes of the research related to the boundaries of old age, both spiritual and physical, have been described. The second part brings forward the opinions of Poles about ageing, the frequency with which Poles reflect upon their own old age, concerns related to old age. The third part is a description of attitudes towards older people in Poland. The indicated parts are preceded by a short demographic characterisation of the demographic situation in Poland (data from CSO, Eurostat and UN) and social characterisation of an average Pole aged above 60 years. The summary contains general statements resulting from the analysis of the discussed studies.

⁹ D.J. LEVINSON, *A Conception of Adult Development*, „American Psychologist”, 1986/41(1), p. 3-13.

¹⁰ C. PHILLIPSON, J. BAARS, *Social Theory and Social Ageing*, [in:] J. BOND, S. PEACE, F. DITTMANN, G. WESTERHOF (eds.), *Ageing in Society. European Perspectives on Gerontology*, London: Sage 2008, p. 68-84.

¹¹ S. DE BEAUVOIR, *The Coming of Age*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company 1996, p. 7.

¹² D.B. BROMLEY, *Psychologia starzenia się*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PWN 1969, p. 373.

¹³ WHO, *Multisectoral action for a life course approach to healthy ageing: draft global strategy and plan of action on ageing and health*. A69/17, 22 April 2016.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN POLAND

As mentioned in the introduction, the population of Poland systematically decreases. According to the demographic prognosis for Poland prepared by CSO for years 2008-2035, the number of Poles will decrease by over two millions (from 38 million to just under 36 million).

Eurostat's data is similar – it is estimated that the population indicator in Poland will be at just above 36 million people (decrease of under two million). The prognoses of UN are more pessimistic, since they estimate the population of Poland in 2035 will be just above 34 mln people (hence, it will decrease by more than 3 million). It was calculated that between 2015 and 2020 the percentage of people aged above 65 years in the society will equal to that of persons aged 0-17 years¹⁴. The listing of statistics is presented in the table below.

Tab. 1. Prognoses of CSO, Eurostat and UN about the demographic situation in Poland.

Data provider	Population in thousands		Balance
	2015	2035	
Eurostat	38 068	36 141	-1 927
GUS CSO	38 016	35 993	-2 023
ONZ UN	37 580	34 197	-3 383

Source: own elaboration based on: *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008-2035*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2009, p. 188.

The population decline will be accompanied by another demographic trend: a sharp increase (from over 5 thousand to over 8 thousand) in the number of older people aged above 65 years. The percentage of persons aged 80 years and above will be higher as well, with the change from 3% of the general population in 2007 to 7.7% in 2035. This phenomenon has been observed not only in the data provided by Eurostat, but also by CSO and UN (although according to CSO and UN the increase will be slightly lower, with 7.2% (CSO) and 7.1% (UN) in 2035). The prognoses for Poland also indicate that there will be a systematic decrease in the mortality rate, therefore extending the length of an average human life. It is estimated that in 2035 men will live approximately 4-5 years longer and women about 3 years longer than now. In cities, men will reach the age of 77.5 years, women 82.8, whereas in rural areas 76.7 and 83 years accordingly¹⁵, as presented in the table below.

¹⁴ *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008-2035*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2009, p. 188.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

Tab. 2. Prognosis of Polish population aged 80 and above (in millions).

Data provider	Life expectancy – men		Life expectancy – women	
	2015	2035	2015	2035
Eurostat	73,1	77,7	81,2	84,5
GUS CSO	72,3	77,1	80,2	82,9
ONZ UN	72,3	75,5	80,4	82,8

Source: own elaboration based on: *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008-2035*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2009, p. 190.

Within the next thirty years, therefore the lifetime of one generation of Poles, the percentage of older people in the population will increase from 13.9% to 23.2%¹⁶.

3. SOCIAL CHARACTERISATION OF AN AVERAGE POLE AGED 60 YEARS AND ABOVE

3.1. HOUSING

Households of seniors are characterised by singularisation, therefore a high percentage of people living on their own. According to a Public Opinion Research Centre's survey *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku (The image of an average elderly Pole)*, three quarters of older people aged above 60 years (74%) are independently running their own household. The reality is rather convergent with the expectations of older people, since 66% of them are willing to live in their own house, occasionally asking their family and friends for help. A little more than 40% of older people (43%) claim that their housing conditions are rather good, and 14% consider them very good. Approximately one in three older people who took part in the survey (35%) perceive their housing conditions as average, and 8% claim they are bad¹⁷.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 188-189.

¹⁷ *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 2.

Tab. 3. Housing conditions and satisfaction with housing conditions.

Evaluation of housing conditions	Satisfaction with housing conditions		
	Very/rather satisfied	Average/satisfied	Rather/ very unsatisfied
Very good	96%	3%	1%
Rather good	85%	13%	2%
Average	56%	35%	9%
Rather bad	19%	35%	46%
Very bad	5%	17%	78%

Source: own elaboration based on *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku*, Warszawa: Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 3.

The level of older persons' satisfaction with housing conditions seems to be quite high in Poland. Almost three quarters of respondents are satisfied (71%), whereas almost one quarter (23%) are very satisfied. Eight in seven people are unsatisfied with their housing conditions (8%). Even though the percentage of satisfaction is high, it is worth mentioning that the housing conditions of older people are worse than the average, especially when one considers what technical devices they are equipped with (water supply, lavatory, bathroom, central heating)¹⁸. The CBOS survey *Portret społeczno-demograficzny seniorów* [*The socio-demographic image of seniors*] shows that the main reason for singularisation is the death of a spouse. Widows and widowers constitute only 2% of the age group 18-59 years, whereas in the group 60 years and above this percentage rapidly grows. It is the highest in the age group 75+, where almost half of people are widowed (46%)¹⁹.

3.2. FINANCIAL SITUATION

Over one third of those who took part in the survey (36%) are concerned by poor living conditions and difficulties to provide for themselves when they think about their old age. These concerns seem to be justified. A very high percentage of Polish society aged above 60 years do not work²⁰. One can distinguish two caesurae in the activity in the labour market of Poles. The first one is 60 years of age. 28%

¹⁸ B. SZATUR-JAWORSKA, *Pieniężne świadczenia społeczne i sytuacja mieszkaniowa osób starszych*, [in:] B. SZATUR-JAWORSKA (ed.), *Stan przestrzegania praw osób starszych w Polsce. Analiza i rekomendacje działań*, Biuro RPO, Warszawa 2008, p. 64.

¹⁹ *Portret społeczno-demograficzny seniorów*, Warszawa: Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 2.

²⁰ *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku*, Warszawa: Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 4.

of the subjects in this study, aged 60-65 years, still work, and within this group 23% work full time. The second caesura is the boundary of 65 years: in the group of older people aged 66 to 74 years the number of the people who still earn their living is three times lower (8%) and only 5% still work full time²¹. According to the CSO prognoses, the percentage of people in the post-working age will constantly increase and in 2035 they will constitute 26.7% of the general population in Poland, which means there will be an increase by 11 percentage points comparing to 2007²². Whether a person continues to work at the age of 60+ is linked to their education. Within the group having primary education, 96% do not undertake a permanent, temporary or part-time work. The percentage drops to 85% for those with NVQ and 84% for secondary education holders. It is the lowest for the most educated people. In this group 22% of Poles aged 60+ work full time, and 70% do not undertake any work at all²³.

8% of people aged up to 59 years consider the financial situation of their household bad or rather bad, which is also the case for 14% of 60-65 year olds, 13% of 66-74 year olds and 11% of Poles aged 75 years and above²⁴. To fully understand the financial situation of older people in Poland, one should compare the data with a subjective evaluation of the amount of money held by them. 7% claims that they live well and they have enough money without saving too much. Almost one in two subjects (46%) live at an average level, which means they have enough money for everyday spending, though they cannot afford any bigger spending without saving. Fewer people (41%) claim they live sparingly and they need to save on an everyday basis. 6% consider themselves poor and struggle to satisfy their basic needs²⁵.

3.3. WAYS OF SPENDING FREE TIME

As indicated by the results of *Sposoby spędzania czasu przez seniorów* [*The ways of spending free time by seniors*] by CBOS, almost all of the older people who took part in the survey and aged 60+ watch tv in their free time (98%), the majority go to church and take part in church services (88%). Many of them meet their

²¹ *Portret społeczno-demograficzny seniorów*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 5.

²² *Prognoza ludności na lata 2008-2035*, Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2009, p. 4.

²³ *Portret społeczno-demograficzny seniorów*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 6.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁵ *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 4-7.

acquaintances and friends at their place (88%) or they go out (78%), or visit their family or relatives outside of their household (84%). The majority also read book, magazines, newspapers (84%), listen to the radio or music (82%), go on a walk or hike (75%), take care of their summer house or garden (70%). More than a half of people aged 60+ take care of their grandchildren / great grandchildren (59%). Less than a half travels throughout the country and visit different places (45%), practise sport – gymnastics, swim at swimming pool, ride a bike (43%). Almost one in three older people aged 60+ uses a computer, internet (30%), and 27% take part in the cultural life – go to cinema (27%), museums, galleries, expositions (25%), theatre, operas, concerts (23%), travel throughout Europe, the world (23%)²⁶.

The conclusions shown above confirm the research of Iwona A. Oliwińska, considering the life styles of Poles. The subjects aged 60-65 years “barely take part in the culture (they would rather watch tv than go to theatre or cinema), and they spend their free time in a passive way (they take part in activities that do not require any movement or physical effort). The author points at the relation between the activity in many areas and the age. The older the people, the more they limit their activity, staying home or spending time with their friends or family²⁷.

Older people’s opinion about the lack of products and services on the Polish market seems to be interesting. Two fifths of people receiving pensions (41%) claim there are not enough care services for older people. Two fifths of pensioners (38%) expect more discounts or vouchers for seniors to cinemas, theatres, museums. One third (34%) suggest there are a few tv and radio channels addressed to older people, and there are not enough activities in their local area, not enough work agencies for the elderly and a lack of tourist offers adapted to the lifestyle of seniors²⁸. M. and J. Halicki posit that only 14% of older people are engaged in an activity of an organisation or society based on a membership²⁹.

It is worth mentioning that, in traditional societies, older people constituted a low percentage, since not many of them reached the old-old age. In modern societies, older people constitute one fifth or even one quarter of the population, therefore they are a large group, they create their institutions and organisations targeted at meeting their own needs.

²⁶ *Sposoby spędzania czasu przez seniorów*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 4-5. The subjects were presented with a list of 26 activities.

²⁷ A.I. OLIWIŃSKA, *Style życia współczesnych Polaków*, [in:] P. SZUKALSKI, I. OLIWIŃSKA, E. BOJANOWSKA, Z. SZWEDA-LEWANDOWSKA (eds.), *To idzie starość – polityka społeczna a przygotowanie do starzenia się ludności Polski*, Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych 2008, p. 59.

²⁸ *Sytuacja ludzi starszych w społeczeństwie – plany a rzeczywistość*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2009, p. 15-16.

²⁹ M. HALICKA, J. HALICKI, *Integracja społeczna i aktywność ludzi starszych*, [in:] B. SYNAK (ed.), *Polska starość*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2002, p. 190.

Tab. 4. The most popular ways of spending free time by older people.

Ways of spending free time	Statement		
	Yes	No	N/A
Watching tv	98%	2%	0%
Taking part in church services	88%	12%	0%
Meeting friends	88%	12%	0%
Seeing family/relatives outside the household	84%	16%	0%
Reading books/ magazines/ newspapers	84%	16%	0%
Listening to the radio / music	82%	18%	0%
Going out with friends	78%	22%	0%
Going on a walk, hiking	75%	25%	0%
Taking care of a summer house, garden	70%	30%	0%
Taking care of grandchildren / great grandchildren	59%	35%	6%

Source: own elaboration based on: *Sposoby spędzania czasu przez seniorów*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 4-5.

3.4. SATISFACTION WITH LIFE

Almost two thirds of subjects declared they were satisfied with their life (65%), out of which 13% considered themselves very satisfied, and one in two respondents (52%) claimed they were rather satisfied. Nearly one in three older people (30%) considered their level of satisfaction as average, whereas 5% are unsatisfied with their life and one in one hundred respondents (1%) claims they are very unsatisfied³⁰.

Whether older people are satisfied or not is linked to their socio-economic position; the higher it is, the better their financial situation, higher income per person in the family as well as their education and position at work. Older people are mostly satisfied with their family life, 91% parents declared they were happy with their children. In addition, the vast majority of spouses were satisfied with their relationship. The second most popular source of satisfaction are the bonds with their “little homeland” (their address and friends as well as relatives). The

³⁰ *Obraz typowego Polaka w starszym wieku*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 12.

least satisfactory aspects of life are its economic and health side and the future perspectives³¹.

Tab. 5. Level of satisfaction with life and sources of satisfaction.

Sources of satisfaction	Level of satisfaction		
	Very/rather satisfied	Averagely satisfied	Rather / very unsatisfied
Children	91%	7%	2%
Marriage	89%	8%	3%
Address	84%	12%	4%
Friends and close acquaintances	82%	15%	3%
Housing conditions	71%	21%	8%

Source: own elaboration based on: Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2010, p. 14.

3.5. EVERYDAY PROBLEMS OF OLDER PEOPLE

In the CBOS survey *Seniorzy a młodsze pokolenia – problemy życia codziennego* [*Seniors and younger generations – everyday life issues*], the level of self-sufficiency of older people was tested using three indicators: 1) the occurrence of mobility problems, making it difficult to leave their house, 2) need of help in everyday activities, 3) difficulties to sort out administrative matters.

According to the survey, 20% of Poles aged 60+ have mobility problems, and in 5% of them such difficulties are constant (often occur). The analysis of the data for different groups of seniors shows that such issues occur far more often at the age of 75+: they appear in 30% of population at this age, and for 10% it is a serious difficulty, since it occurs frequently. The lack of help in everyday activities is not such a frequent issue. It affects 16% of Poles aged 60+, and it occurs often in 3% of cases. The situation is similar in different groups of seniors, there is not much difference between people aged 60-65 years and 75+. Difficulties linked to dealing with administrative matters are even less frequent. Such problems occur in 9% of Poles aged 60+, though it's an issue for only 1% of them, since it often happens³².

Considering the situation of older people, one can assume that the majority of seniors are doing really well. Serious issues start in the phase of 75+ and this is a boundary which marks an increasingly lower level of dependence.

³¹ *Założenia polityki ludnościowej Polski*, Warszawa: Rządowa Rada Ludnościowa 2013, p. 12-16.

³² *Seniorzy a młodsze pokolenia – problemy życia codziennego*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 2-3.

4. WHEN DOES YOUTH END AND OLD AGE START?

The public opinion considers the age of 60 years the beginning of old age (WHO also marks the start of old age at 60 years). From the 90s, one can observe the alternation of the boundary between youth and old age in the eye of public. Andrzej Malinowski claims that “the cultural changes occurring in 20th century have prolonged the adulthood and moved the beginning of the old age by approximately 10 years”³³.

The boundaries between youth and old age move along with the age. The psychological factor might be of high importance to this matter, that is reaching a certain physical age does not always go together with a subjective feeling of an individual’s age. The CBOS survey *Polacy wobec własnej starości* [*Poles about their own old age*] suggests that youth lasts until 37 years of age (average age of 36.97). It is followed by adulthood which lasts until the age of 63 years (63 years and 3 months to be accurate). According to the subjects, this is the age at which old age begins³⁴.

Tab. 6. Boundaries of youth and old age and the age of subjects.

Age	When?			
	does youth end and adulthood start		does adulthood end and old age start	
	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
18-24	33,84	31,39	60,45	59,11
25-34	37,04	34,37	63,43	59,89
35-44	39,16	37,75	64,80	63,44
45-54	37,45	34,04	65,52	62,06
55-64	40,87	37,81	65,98	62,94
65 years and above	40,09	38,02	65,86	64,69
Total	38,27	35,56	64,46	61,94

Source: own elaboration based on: *Polacy wobec własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2012, p. 3.

The boundaries between old age and youth also differ depending on sex. According to women, irrespective of age, the end of youth takes place later than according

³³ A. MALINOWSKI, *Międzypokoleniowe przemiany właściwości biologicznych i zdrowotnych ludzi w podeszłym wieku*, [in:] M. DZIĘGIELEWSKA (ed.), *Przygotowanie do starości*, Łódź: Zakład Oświaty Dorosłych 1997, p. 126.

³⁴ *Polacy wobec własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 3.

to men: by a year – three on average (depending on the age category). The same rule applies to the beginning of old age. This phase of life starts, according to women, a year up to three and a half years (depending on the age category) later than according to men³⁵.

4.1. OLD AGE – PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

The spiritual aspect of old age is largely dependent on the choice of an individual and is expressed by, for example, a particular attitude towards life or the lifestyle led by an individual. The spiritual wellbeing of older people is generally better than their physical wellbeing. CBOS surveys show that the distance between the spiritual and physical wellbeing increases with age.

Tab. 7. Age compared to physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Physical and spiritual wellbeing	Physical wellbeing	Spiritual wellbeing
I feel rather young	61%	68%
I feel rather old	14%	12%
I sometimes feel young, sometimes old	25%	20%

Source: own elaboration based on: *Polacy o starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 1999, p. 7.

The dissonance seems to be particularly explicit after the age of 60 years. The spiritual wellbeing is hugely impacted by the financial situation, the better it is, the better the spiritual wellbeing of older people³⁶. Wealthier people have an opportunity to spend their free time in a more creative way, for example by freely using cultural services. It is worth mentioning that the students of the Third Age University (*Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku*) are mostly better educated and wealthier. “Youth” and “old age” in the spiritual area are mostly affected by one’s choice – they are expressing a particular attitude towards life.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 6.

³⁶ *Polacy o starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 1999, p. 7.

Tab. 8. Age and physical and spiritual wellbeing of Poles.

Age	Physical wellbeing				Spiritual wellbeing			
	I feel rather young	I sometimes feel young, sometimes old	I feel rather old	Difficult to say	I feel rather young	I sometimes feel young, sometimes old	I feel rather old	Difficult to say
50-54	50%	41%	9%	0%	57%	37%	6%	0%
55-59	33%	42%	25%	0%	42%	41%	16%	1%
60-64	26%	51%	22%	1%	42%	34%	23%	1%
65-69	18%	46%	35%	1%	35%	32%	32%	1%
70 years and above	14%	30%	56%	1%	27%	27%	44%	2%

Source: Own elaboration based on: *Polacy o starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 1999, p. 8.

It is also worth mentioning other results. Older people feel redundant. In the group of 60-64 years, it is observed that there are many people not having too much hope for future. What is more, the vast majority of people aged above 65 years old do not have hope at all. This shows that public institutions have a lot to do to encourage older people to become more active³⁷.

5. OPINIONS OF POLES ABOUT THEIR OWN OLD AGE

The interest in one’s own old age systematically grows. Between 1998-2012, there has been a decrease in the percentage of people who do not think about old age at all; the increase in interest resulted mainly from a growth in number of people who think about it, but rarely. Auto-reflection about old age comes with age, when the subject of old age becomes more “real”. It is worth mentioning though that there has also been an increase of such thoughts within the group of the youngest respondents (aged 18 to 24 years). One can assume that this could be caused by thinking about social security of one’s old age. It also appears that women tend to show more interest in their old age than men. Such a difference can be noticed especially in the age category of people aged 65 years and above.

³⁷ *Między młodością a starością*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2007, p. 9.

Tab. 9. Reflection upon own old age.

Sources of satisfaction	Thinking about old age			
	very often / quite often	yes, but rarely	no	I am already old
1998	33%	35%	24%	8%
2007	42%	35%	20%	3%
2009	37%	35%	26%	2%
2012	34%	38%	23%	5%

Source: own elaboration based on: *Polacy wobec własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2012, p. 1.

One of the biggest fears related to old age is the fear of disease (infirmity, memory loss) and loss of independence. Poles tend to fear less of their financial situation. Anxieties linked to old age are correlated with social characteristics of the subjects. Older people are afraid of suffering linked to age-related diseases, whereas younger people fear bad living conditions and difficulties to earn their living. Loneliness and loss of relatives are the biggest fears of the largest city's (more than half a million inhabitants) dwellers and, what is interesting, the subjects in a good financial situation. Another interesting aspect is the ways in which the respondents would like to organise their old age, when they will need support. Almost two thirds (64%) would like to live in their own flat and receiving occasional help from their relatives – family, friends, neighbours. One in seven subjects (15%) would not mind living with children, grandchildren or extended family³⁸.

Tab. 10. Fears of Poles linked to old age.

Fears linked to old age	2000	2009	2012
Disease, infirmity, memory loss	71%	68%	73%
Being a burden for others, loss of independence, dependence on others	58%	50%	56%
Poor living conditions, difficulties to earn living	41%	36%	32%
Loneliness, loss of relatives	37%	34%	32%
Suffering	20%	20%	18%

Source: Own elaboration based on: *Polacy wobec własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2012, p. 2.

³⁸ *Polacy wobec własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2012, p. 7.

6. ATTITUDES TOWARDS OLDER PEOPLE

CBOS surveys conducted in years 1999-2009 show that the attitude towards older people in Poland has been systematically improving. The percentage of persons who claim that in their environment people are mostly kind (definitely or rather) increased in the last decade from 73% to 81%.

Tab. 11. Attitudes towards older people.

Attitude towards older people	2000	2007	2009
Definitely kind	22%	19%	24%
Rather kind	51%	55%	57%
Neutral, no interest	20%	21%	16%
Rather reluctant	4%	2%	2%
Definitely reluctant	1%	1%	0%
Difficult to say	2%	2%	1%

Source: own elaboration based on: *Polacy wobec ludzi starszych i własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2009, p. 5.

For years, the kindest environment to seniors have been three groups: family (82%), neighbours (71%) and parish community (69%). There is a systematic increase in the percentage of people claiming that, in these groups, they have observed a positive attitude towards older people. The highest increase has been noticed in the category “in family”. In 200, 69% of the subjects stated that older people are treated with kindness in their family, one in five subjects (21%) claimed that older people were treated neutrally, while 5% answered that family was reluctant. In 2009, kindness was declared by 82% of the subjects, one in ten respondents (12%) answered that older people encounter neutrality and 2% that the emotion expressed towards older people was reluctance³⁹. Although there was a high percentage of declared kindness from the family’s side, it is worth mentioning that in dysfunctional families, for example affected by unemployment or poverty, the factor integrating different generations was not an emotional bond, but the economic profits from the fact that they lived in a common household with people who had a permanent source of income. Moreover, in such families older people are often abused (physically and mentally). According to Trafiałek, “the statistics are not showing much data related to the issue, but the evidence to

³⁹ *Polacy wobec ludzi starszych i własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2009, p. 5.

support this hypothesis can be found in crisis intervention centres as well as in county's, community's and urban family assistance centres"⁴⁰.

Tab. 12. Attitude towards older people in selected social groups.

Attitude towards older people	in family	in neighbour- hood	in parish
Kindness	82%	71%	69%
Neutrality, lack of interest	12%	23%	18%
Reluctance	2%	2%	1%
Difficult to say	4%	4%	12%

Source: own elaboration based on: *Polacy wobec ludzi starszych i własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2009, p. 6.

Kindness and positive attitude towards older people are linked to treating them with respect. There is a systematic increase in the percentage of people who claim that older people are respected in Poland. In 1998, the percentage of the subjects who agreed with such a statement (definitely respects or rather respects) was 35%, whereas in 2009 the percentage was almost twice higher and equalled 64%. The respondents mostly claim that older people are more respected in their environment than in the whole society. This probably results from the fact that people tend to identify themselves with their relatives, also to enhance positive self-esteem. Indeed, it can be observed in their views on attitudes towards older people⁴¹.

Of course, the increase in kindness towards older people is very positive, though it still does not mean there are no negative attitudes. A survey *Czy osoby starsze są naszym społeczeństwie dyskryminowane?* (*Are older people discriminated in our society?*), people aged 60+ are relatively the most frequent witnesses of bad or worse treatment in public areas – on the street, in a shop, in public transport (18% of them witnessed such a situation, 3% were treated with disrespect). Such situations are less frequent in health care facilities (11% of them witnessed and 5% experienced them) and in offices, banks (6% witnessed, 3% experienced such treatment). 2% of seniors experienced bad or worse treatment in their family and 6% witnessed such a situation. In general, one in ten older people (10%) personally experienced bad or worse treatment, whereas one in four (26%) witnessed such a situation⁴².

⁴⁰ E. TRAFIAŁEK, *Rodzina i środowisko zamieszkania*, [in:] B. SZATUR-JAWORSKA (ed.), *Stan przestrzegania praw osób starszych w Polsce*, p. 84.

⁴¹ *Polacy wobec ludzi starszych i własnej starości*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2009, p. 4-6.

⁴² *Czy osoby starsze są w naszym społeczeństwie dyskryminowane?*, Warszawa: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2016, p. 4.

7. SUMMARY

The objective of this article was to outline the image of an average older person and to describe the attitude of Poles towards older people and old age. After the analysis of the statistics presented in the article and generated by CBOS, one can draw the following general conclusions:

1. Old age is the period after the age of 60 years for Poles, though one can observe that this boundary changes with age. For young people, old age begins earlier than for older people.
2. Biological, physical old age is not equivalent to spiritual old age. This results mostly from the current development of medicine, thanks to which the quality of older people's lives has improved. "Youth" and "old age" in the spiritual area are mostly dependent on an individual choice.
3. Poles consider themselves kind towards older people, the way in which older people are treated has systematically improved.
4. According to the research led by CBOS, Poles consider older people necessary in the society. They are valued since they help raising their grandchildren, they also offer support based on their experience and knowledge, being alert with regards to what is happening in their closest neighbourhood, or due to the financial support.
5. Family and relatives constitute the most important support group for older people. This highlights the prominence of family in the hierarchy of values of Poles.
6. Older people prefer to spend their free time passively. The most popular activities are: watching television, talking to friends and neighbours, social meetings and taking some rest in general (taking a nap, relaxing, drinking coffee or tea). The least preferred forms of spending free time are: using the computer (internet), going to cinema, theatre, to concerts, discos, cafes or going out for a beer, as well as social activities or working to protect the environment.
7. Old age and ageing are the phenomena with cultural background. In a society, there could appear cultural patterns that encourage or suppress the activity of older people, their creativity, opportunities to act. In this context, public institutions have the biggest influence on older people's lives.

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ŁUDZIE STARZY, STARZENIE SIĘ I STAROŚĆ W ŚWIETLE WYBRANYCH BADAŃ OPINII SPOŁECZNEJ W POLSCE

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł bazuje na analizie sondaży przeprowadzonych przez Główny Urząd Statystyczny oraz Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej. Artykuł podzielono na cztery części. W pierwszej zreferowano wyniki badań odnoszące się do granicy starości, zarówno tej duchowej, jak i fizycznej. W części drugiej przedstawiono opinie Polaków na temat starzenia się, częstotliwość myślenia na temat własnej starości, obawy przed starością. W części trzeciej opisano postawy wobec osób starszych w Polsce. Wskazane bloki tematyczne poprzedza krótka charakterystyka demograficzna sytuacji ludnościowej Polski (dane GUS, Eurostat i ONZ) oraz charakterystyka społeczna przeciętnego Polaka po 60 roku życia.

Słowa kluczowe: ludzie starzy; starość; starzenie się; badania opinii społecznej.

OLDER PEOPLE, AGEING AND OLD AGE IN THE LIGHT OF SOME PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS IN POLAND

Summary

This paper is based on the analysis of surveys led by Central Statistical Office of Poland and Public Opinion Research Center. The article consists of four parts. In the first one, the outcomes of the research related to the boundaries of old age, both spiritual and physical, have been described. The second part brings forward the opinions of Poles about ageing, the frequency with which Poles reflect upon their own old age, concerns related to old age. The third part is a description of attitudes towards older people in Poland. The indicated parts are preceded by a short demographic characterisation of the demographic situation in Poland (data from CSO, Eurostat and UN) and social characterisation of an average Pole aged above 60 years.

Key words: older people; old age; ageing; public opinion surveys.