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Self-Realization of Seniorsas a Way of Overcoming Social ExclusionIntroductionThe aging of population is one of the most pressing problems of the modern
world. Because of this, demographers refer to the present days as the age of old
people. According to statistics, the growth rate of the number of the elderly in
the world is twice the population growth as a whole that is why a number of
problems have appeared, which require speedy resolution. These are – the problems of social adaptation and social exclusion, the problems of effective use of
the existing potential of older people and creating conditions for their education
and productive development. The resolution of the above problems requires
a more thorough study of this period of ontogenesis, forming a new attitude
toward the elderly and their participation in social development at the national
level, the creation of programs of psychological support of “positive aging” and
the search for new forms of cooperation, involving the elderly in active social
life. The results of the analysis of psychological and educational literature and
the public life in Ukraine show that the need of the elderly for education and
self-realization cannot find opportunities for satisfaction because the current
state policy and the society are poorly targeted at seniors and avoid the topic
of social exclusion of these people. However, their motivation for continuous
learning and development, their pursuit of activities, and the need for social,
communicative and cultural ties make a person at this age seek new opportunities for self-realization and avoiding of social exclusion.
The entire industrial world is experiencing demographic changes. Demographers very often call our time: the age that has become old. If we compare
the average lifespan at the beginning of the twentieth century and today, the
difference between them is about 30 years: in 1900 people lived to 47-55 years of
age and nowadays – to around 85.
Roland Pressa, a French gerontologist and demographer, explained this phenomenon as such, where the proportion of people who have grown old is increasing, while the number of young people is decreasing. A Polish researcher,
Edward Rosset, said that the most dangerous consequence of this phenomenon
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is the aging of the group of population which has an active role in the production process and which provides the livelihood in the modern economy.
At the same time, the aging is a problem worrying not only economists and
gerontologists, but also psychologists, because the older generation finds it very
difficult to cope with the rapid scientific and technological progress. In particular, it affects the representatives of professions whose work is connected with
intellectual activity, whose knowledge needs to be updated because it does not
meet the standards of our time. It is not easy for them to learn to work with
computers and to keep up with technologization, informatization and computerization of the production process itself.
Today it is difficult to find a job for a person who has reached 35, because
the professional experience is valued less than the modern education. In addition, aging is accompanied by a variety of physical and psychological illnesses,
which impose restrictions on the ability of a person of this age to work productively and satisfy one’s everyday needs.
Sometimes old people become a burden for those who care about them, for
the state, which should provide funds for their care and treatment, but in fact
they are often thrown out by society itself and just stay out of active social life.
In this regard, modern scientists are faced with a number of problems associated with aging and the need for their prompt decision. Among them - problems
of social adaptation of older people and social exclusion, problems of effective
use of the existing potential of older people, their education and productive
self-realization.
Old age is often referred to as the “evening of life” or “ twilight period”.
However, despite these pessimistic allegories, at the same time, this age period
still encourages those who feel physically healthy, have an enough amount of
energy and life experiences, to be active and use all of their abilities in practice,
to satisfy their own need for self-development and self-realization.
That is why this period of life is also often called “juvenility in old age”.
Therefore, the main challenge that faces psychologists, heronto-psychologists,
social psychologists, and social workers is to help seniors adapt to age-related
physical, physiological and social changes. First of all, to help them form an adequate perception of their own age and aging, develop the ability intelligently
allocate the time and use productively the years which have remained to form
the ability to resist the affective impoverishment, maintain emotional flexibility,
internal cohesion and meaningful perception of life, develop the ability to resist
social stereotypes about older people, in particular with regard to their physical,
occupational and social activities, their place in the society, possibilities for their
development and self-realization. The study of the phenomenon of «self-realization» refers to the first half of the XX century.
In 1935, the terms “self-realization” and “self-actualization” were introduced
into the scientific usage by a neuropsychophysiologist K. Goldstein. In his work
entitled «The Organism», K. Goldstein described self-realization as a universal
principle of life.
In the most general sense, the notion of «self-realization» indicates the implementation of opportunities for development of «Self». Quite often this term
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is used as a synonym for the words «self-development», «self-actualization»,
«self-fulfillment». All these words are very close in their meaning. They were
all described by humanists as phenomena which indicate: the realization of
a personality’s natural potential (K. Horney), human desire for a total identification and development of one’s opportunities and abilities (K. Rogers), healthy
development of human capabilities as an opportunity to become what one can
be, to live fully and meaningfully (A. Maslow), achievement by a personality
of integrity and unity through individuation (C.G. Jung), a personality’s innate
desire to self-realization (Sh. Buhler).
In general, the desire for the realization of one’s own “Self”, was explained
by practically almost all authors as the disclosure of latent potentialities of the
individual. At the same time, not one of the humanists tried to explain definitively such important basic methodological notions in the self-realization theory
as the nature of self-realization, motive forces and conditions of self-realization,
determinants and meaning of self-realization, which even today remain debatable, since modern scientists could not come to an agreement on what self-realization is: a process, a result, an innate tendency to self-realization, an ultimate
goal, or something else (Коростылев, 2005:10).
During the Soviet times, Ukrainian and Russian psychologists were considering the problem of self-realization in the context of psychology of self-determination, in particular, it was not interpreted as an independent branch of
psychological science, but as part of the psychology of “self-determination”, the
contents of which was most fully revealed through the concept of “personality”,
which had been studied in the area of such notions as “self-cognition”, “self-expression”, “self-regulation” (K. A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, B.G. Ananev, L. Bozhovich, M. R. Ginsburg, G.S. Kostiuk, M. J. Boryshevskiy, S. D. Maksymenko
etc.) (Горностай, Т. М. Титаренкотаін, 2001:111).
In the 1990s, a tendency to view self-realization as a separate subject of study
appeared. In the current psychology, it is interpreted as the form and the result
of an individual’s activity (D. A. Leontiev), realization of opportunities of “Self”
by means of persons’ own efforts and in collaboration with others (L. O. Korostyleva), as a manifestation of human self, as a conscious, purposeful process
of opening and objectifying of essential powers of man (V. E. Galazhynsky), as
the embodiment of man’s potential in a variety spheres of practical activities:
work, game, cognition, communication, etc. (Tytarenko T. M) (Горностай, Т. М.
Титаренкотаін, 2001:111).
The question of self-realization in ontogeny has a special place. The sequence
of stages forms a temporal structure of existence of a personality. Each stage
represents a new level of development. It is complicated by the fact, that many
dimensions of a life’s journey are the interweaving of different lines of development, each of them having its own history. The movement goes through life
with the development of man as an individual, as a person and as a subject of
activity, that ultimately forms a man as a unique integrity - individuality. These,
combined, but at the same time different directions of a personality’s movement
in one’s development, determine changes in a person’s way of life and its structures, determine the formation and self-determination of a personality during
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each age period, influencing the behavior and personal choices throughout their
life’s journey with baggage with which they enter into retirement (Максименко,
2006).
Self-realization of seniors was examined by V. D. Alperovych, L. Antsiferova,
Z. A. Butueva, A. L. Buryakovskyy, S. L. Frank, A. Krasnova, H. A. Rybakova,
N. F. Shakhmatov, L. V. Prokhorova, T. Tytarenko, and others., who decided to
study it in the context of concepts of the way of life and the meaning of life
(Краснова, 1997:3-19).
Almost of all of the authors mentioned emphasized that the list of human
needs in old age is in most cases the same as in other age periods, but the structure and hierarchy of needs have changed, particularly such needs as creativity,self-realization, activation of life of old people, sense of community are put forward to
the center of the motivational sphere(АнцифероваЛ , 2006:271-272)‟.
The period of old age is the final stage of human life, it is important that during this period everyone can feel that their life is still meaningful, which helps
everybody to live actively and productively.
It is well known that the idea of psychological age is relative, that the criteria
of periodization of age and life expectancy depend on the biological characteristics of the organism and social environmental factors.
Social factors include: the character of work, level of provision of material
goods and medical care, housing, an individual’s attitude towards the society,
objectivity and realism in assessing individual capacity, adequacy of an individual’s choice of social roles and one’s place in the society.
The biological factors include: endogenous (a set of internal resources of the
human body: gender, heredity (genetic code), favorable or unfavorable inclinations) and exogenous factors (the conditions in the environment: natural and climatic conditions in the environment, the environmental situation, the impact of
solar radiation and so on).
There is no doubt that biological life expectancy is determined by its genetic constitution, but it is usually not fully realized due to deleterious effects of
social conditions. At the same time, biological life serves as a guide for the real
sequel average life expectancy. The difference between these two values is the
reserve that can be realized by improving the conditions and life styles.
However, nowadays psychologists, gerontologists, physicians still cannot
determine when the period of aging begins. Most of them (B. Przhyhoda, E.B.
Harlok, J. Birren, D. B. Bromley etc.) consider that it is 60-65 years of age, but others believe, that no calendar dates are unacceptable (I. B. Davydovskiу), because
aging is an enormously individual process. The most important psychological
factor of aging is the acceptance of one’s own old age (Шахматов,1987:110).
Another important criterion which indicates the entry of a person in the
period of late maturity (age) is the social criterion, which is connected with the
retirement of an official person.
However, different countries have different retirement ages for different occupational groups, for men and for women (55-65 years), so this criterion cannot
be taken as a basis for setting the age limit at which retirement occurs. Old age
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has no distinctly determined boundaries – either at its early stage or during the
final one. It has a distinctly individual character.
Traditionally, the period after 60 was studied by herontology, because it was
always considered as the time of aging, fading and retirement. At the same time,
it should be mentioned that the period of late adulthood lasts rather long – from
55 to 75 years, probably twenty years. Usually, it is divided into several stages.
A man of 55 is significantly different from a person at 75 years, not only in terms
of their state of health, but also the motivation, sense of life and self-realization.
This is why researchers usually divide late adulthood into two stages: the first
stage – “early old age” or “the third age “, which lasts from retirement to 70-75
years of age, and the second stage - “old age “, which comes only after 70. This is
why those who have not reached 70 but have remained in good health and are
able to lead an active and independent life, to maintain oneself without assistance, should be considered as the potential productive part of retired seniors.
At the same time, it should be noted that this period of ontogeny has never
been considered as a productive period in a person’s development. Most people
of 55 are retired and consider their professional career finished. It has happened
for many reasons. One of them is the stereotypical attitude to this period of age
and to a person, who has reached 55.
Psychologists agree that the attitude to people in late adulthood depends
more on social and psychological factors, including widespread social stereotypes, than on biological aging. The most common social stereotypes about seniors are: conservative, eccentric, apathetic, weird, though traditionally old age
has always been associated with wisdom and experience. Most authors (V. D.
Alperovych, B.G. Annan, D. Y. Raigorodskiy, M. V. Ermolaeva, G. S. Suhobska
and others) also note that the popular stereotypes of passivity and conservatism
of seniors empirically have not been confirmed, that retirement should not lead
to the cessation of professional activity and exclude seniors from the society.
If the life was meaningful and creative, progressive development of personality during old age would not stop. Systematic long-term scientific researches
show that mental changes in seniors are not of personal nature. Losing physical
strength, an older person retains the ability to grow as a personality.
Victor Frunkl has rightly pointed out that a man who has spent a fruitful
life would not become a decrepit old man, but rather his mental and emotional
qualities that have been developed throughout his life are saved, despite the fact
that his physical forces have become weak (Франкл , 1990:157).
Eventually, a modern society that is undergoing a severe economic crisis,
on the one hand, understanding the value of such an experience of seniors, is
trying to use the practical knowledge and worldly wisdom of elderly people, but
on the other - excludes them from the system of social activities. But the society
that considers itself civilized has no right to ignore personal problems of seniors
who have been excluded from it.
The term “social exclusion” emerged in the late twentieth century during
the study of poverty and such social phenomena as marginalization, deprivation and others. The concept of “social exclusion” was introduced by a French
governor Rene Lenoir (Lenoir, 1989).
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As a result, the static concept of “poverty” was replaced by a new dynamic
category - “social exclusion”. This concept is used to describe the limitation or
deprivation of rights in civil law, such as restricting access to institutions of
social integration, especially in the labor market, to the social services, access
to education and the right to work. An important contribution to the understanding of this concept and the construction of a theory of social exclusion was
made by the following scientists: G. Rodgers, B. Jordan, A. de Haan, S. Maxwell,
A. Power, Ch. Gore, W. Wilson, R. Atkinson, J. Hobearft, M. Wolf, S. Pauham, P.
Abrahamson and others.
Today the problems of social exclusion is dealt with by F. Borodkin, T. Baraulyna, M. Wolf, D. Hom’en, J. Houf, K. Duffy, L. Zvaak, J. Friedman, V. R. Schmidt
and others.
As for seniors, this term is used when talking about the limitations connected with aging or with forced retirement, when a person loses their job, the level
of well-being or the social status. As а result of social exclusion, seniors are faced
with destruction of social ties, curtailment of social space, reduced social capital, the problem of trust in the relationship with the society, loss of activity, and
the problem of self-realization.
Today, there are several theories of social exclusion that interpret the state,
feelings, and inner world of an excluded individual.
One of the most developed theories explaining the situation of excluded older people is the « theory of separation», which was first described by J. Rosen
and B. Nyuharten and was later supplemented by E. Cumming and W. Henry.
The essence of the theory is that in old age a person changes the motivation, in
particular, each person at this age is focused on his or her inner world, and his
or her interest in a communicative activity is decreased. Formally, the loss of
social ties begins with retirement and objectively is manifested in the fact that
a person loses previous social roles, their income is reducing and they are going
through a loss of family or separation from family. Subjectively, a person feels
redundant and focuses on their inner world. Distancing from the society, according to the authors, is the most adaptive and successful mode of existence in
old age. This theory reflects the view of aging as a period of involution, whereby
a person becomes unclaimed in the society. This theory is called the “theory
of liberation” (alienation) because the aging allegedly makes an elderly person
“free” - retired from all obligations to society. Both the individual can initiate
this process and others involved in a particular situation. The most unfortunate
element of it is that the authors of this approach consider an elderly person as
redundant in the society and accept it as a norm.
Quite opposite to the theory presented above is the “theory of activeness”,which emphasizes the person’s natural to preserve relationships with the society, and the real reason for severing seniors from the society is the society’s
refusal to collaborate with them.
But in fact, as most of researchers of the psychology of seniors consider,
the peculiarity of the inner world of an old man is the parallel existence of
two orientations: the first – the desire for union, need to feel socially popular,
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meaningful, rewarding and useful, the second – the desire for autonomy, peace,
and self-sufficiency.
However, people who have retired and who do not consider themselves old
feel the need to work just like those who have not entered the retirement age.
Work gives meaning to an elderly person’s life, promotes positive self-perception. Even in the retirement age, they feel the need to continue activity. This
gives them a sense of life satisfaction. The exclusion of an individual from the
mainstream of an active social life based on age is associated usually with the
limitations of his social space and social activities.
Retirement means a loss of communication with the reference group to which
a man has devoted his entire life, the loss of the social role which was important
for that person, which increases the loss of social and psychological incentives,
destruction of professional and interpersonal relationships. Disappointment
and depression, uncertainty and a restrained attitude of the surrounding people, block actualization of potential experiences, prevents the accumulation of
new achievements.
One of the ways to overcome social exclusion of seniors is self-realization.
In the conditions of the development of modern society, including the blurring
of boundaries between generations, the rapid aging of knowledge and transformation of major social institutions, self-realization is converted into the main
social and personal need, which meets the integrity of the individual and the
requirements of society.
Practice shows that currently problems of a person’s self-realization in retirement are not addressed either by herontopsychology, occupational psychology, or psychology of organizations. Human resources managers are more
concerned with the question of how to honestly and tactfully to send elderly
persons to their retirement. But even if organizations, which are rare exceptions,
provide people at the retirement age with work, they usually offer them positions which have nothing to do with the seniors’ main occupation. As usual,
the employers offer either part-time or seasonal work. This suggests that the
provision of an older person with work is rather seen as an exception, but not as
a natural phenomenon.
But despite the difficulties of modern life, people cannot get rid of their social nature, which manifests itself in the need to realize one’s own “Self” in the
activities of the society and to be evaluated by this society. The conflict between
personal desire for activity and social aspects of exclusion updates the topics of
self-realization in old age and encourages finding the relevant system solutions
for restoration of social activity of older people, social capital and connections,
which are the basic condition for self-realization.
The peculiarity of social exclusion of seniors is that it is accompanied by
ageism - the deprivation by age criterion, which can affect anyone reaching the
old age.
The great experience and ability to examine life and events in it in different
coordinate systems enable elderly people to find a new occupation, try to realize
themselves in a new job, take part in new social or any other kind of activity, and
build a productive life after retirement.
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High cognitive formations and positive acquisition that are inherent to the
person in late adulthood, such as dialectical thinking (K. Rigel), wisdom (E. Erickson, P. Baltes) indicate a high level of integration and integrity of individuals and their ability to perform complex types of work with different levels of
intellectual tasks, give useful advice on vital issues. But the society treats the
elderly as objects of influence, which require care and maintenance. It does not
want to see seniors as socially active business partners that seek to meet their
life’s important needs through collaboration with various social institutions and
organizations, to develop their skills and take responsibility for their actions
and decisions.
This tradition of attitudes towards senior people is supported by the society which does not care about those who are trapped in poverty, survive on
low income, and limit themselves in the satisfaction of the elementary human
needs. This is why retirees often seek additional sources of income, settle for
a job which does not fit their profession. These facts indicate that the social activity of seniors is not implemented with the support of the society, but it is
rather their attempt at survival.
ConclusionsSocial and psychological development of man is not limited during any age
period. Development is a continuous process. A person realizes themselves during their entire life. Self-realization never stops. It is a way of a person’s existence.
The progressive development of personality in old age greatly depends on
meaningful, creative life at earlier stages, during which everyone has to form
the ability to integrate the experience, one’s past, present and future life, including the skills of successful coping with life’s challenges and conflicts.
The development of personality in late adulthood has its specificity, which is
connected with the influence of age and retirement.
Exclusion is the elimination of a human being from the society. As a bilateral
process, it should be considered in two aspects: personal and social. The returning of elderly people to the mainstream depends on social and personal factors.
Social exclusion of seniors is accompanied by ageism.
The way of overcoming the exclusion in late adult age is self-realization,
which can be fulfilled in professional or social activities, in the family, in raising
the educational level at the University of the Third Age, in maintaining a healthy
lifestyle, in the development of new forms of l