

STUDY ON ELDERLY PEOPLE AS RESOURCE IN SOCIETY AND FAMILY

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Abstract

This paper explores the untapped potential of elderly individuals as vital resources within families and societies. Challenging the conventional notion of seniors as dependents, it delves into strategies for integrating them actively into social and community roles, resonating with the activity theory's emphasis on continued engagement. A thorough literature review reveals a significant gap in understanding the social, cultural needs, and leisure activities of retirees, crucial for enhancing their quality of life.

Our study predominantly focuses on developing and successfully implementing activities that foster 'more active ageing', thereby keeping seniors engaged at both community and territorial levels for extended periods. This research not only redefines the role of the elderly but also provides practical solutions for their continued active participation, thereby enriching the fabric of society and family life.

J.E.L Clasification: J14, J18, I31, Z13

Keywords: retirees, family, activity, society

1. Introduction

The situation of the elderly people in Romania is described in the literature of the field from rather a demographic and medical point of view. From a social perspective, there are a few regional studies that describe the differences between retirees and people employed or studies regarding the relations between generations (Ionescu, Bunescu, 2007; Tîrhaş, 2007).

The present research targets the identification and definition of aspects referring at the social and cultural life of retirees, to offer operating models of spending their free time, with the objective to keep an active and independent life, which is first of all, qualitative.

We have to mention that the instruments used in research are, generally, determined by a pre-survey (pilot research) which allows the testing of the descriptive scheme, of the instruments and procedures for work, and also the estimation of costs and anticipation of results (Mărginean, 2000). In the qualitative research on the elderly people in the municipality of Cluj- Napoca, we have used the interview as method, the technique used being that of face-to-face semi-structured interview.

2. Literature review

The literature on aging and its social implications offers diverse perspectives, encompassing sociological, psychological, and gerontological approaches. Atkinson (2006) highlights the importance of narrative in understanding the lives of the elderly, emphasizing the richness of life stories captured through interviews. This qualitative approach offers deep insights into the experiences and perspectives of older individuals.

Barrow (1992) takes a broader view, examining aging both at an individual and societal level. His work underscores the complex interplay between aging individuals and the societal structures around them, recognizing the dynamic nature of aging within the context of society.

Bucur (2007), in his discussion on social work with the elderly, provides a practical perspective,

focusing on the challenges and strategies in assisting the aging population. This work is particularly relevant for practitioners in the field of social work and caregiving.

Chelcea (2007) and Davidson (2006) contribute significantly to the methodological aspects of research on the elderly. Chelcea emphasizes both quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a balanced approach to sociological research, while Davidson focuses on the use of probability sampling in social research, ensuring the representativeness and reliability of research findings.

Dooley (2001) and Gal (2003) discuss the role of social work in addressing issues faced by older workers and the elderly in general. These works highlight the challenges and potential strategies for social work practice in the context of an aging population.

The contributions of Iluț (2005), Mărginean (2000), Popovici (2001), Rădulescu (1999), Rotariu (2009), Șchiopu & Verza (1997), and Tîrhaș (2007) further enrich the literature by exploring various dimensions of aging, including the sociology of family, demographic perspectives, psychological aspects of aging, and intergenerational exchange models. Together, these works provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of aging and its impact on individuals, families, and societies.

3. Metodology

The steps of the qualitative research are the following:

- The confirmation of the social self (of the researcher's position in society);
- The adoption of a perspective - in the present research we have used the functionalist paradigm;
- The choice of the study design (the face-to-face semi-structured interview);
- Collection of data – the period between July-October 2021;
- The analysis of data – the period between April-May 2022.

The qualitative research was carried out on a number of 27 people with residence in the municipality of Cuj-Napoca, 12 men and 15 women, all subjects being above the age of 60. They have a medium level of education, respectively elementary studies/ 8 grades or less (6); 10 grades/vocational school (7), high school (10), post-high school studies (2), higher education (2).

The reason of retirement is, mostly, the age limit (19 people), the pre-retirement (4 people) and sickness retirement (4 people).

The profession of the subjects taking part in the interviews, before retirement, has the following structure: workers (10 people), personnel with medium level studies (health, education, services) (6 people), retirees (5 people), clerk, technician, supervisor (4 people), personnel with higher education (2 people). All these socio-demographic data are synthetized in the following matrix, for a better view and identification of the people taking part in the interviews (table 1):

Table 1 – Socio-demographic data in qualitative research

Subjects	Age	Gender	Civil status	Education level	Profession	Reason of retirement
1	68 years	Male	married	10 grades	lathe operator	Sickness
2	66 years	Male	married	Higher education	teacher	Age limit
3	64 years	Male	married	Supervisor training	tehnician	Age limit
4	73 years	Male	married	10 grades	machinist	Sickness

5	68 years	Male	married	Highschool	mechanic	Age limit
6	67 years	Male	divorced	Vocational school	warehouse worker	Age limit
7	64 years	Male	divorced	highschool	warehouse worker	Pre-retirement
8	71 years	Male	married	Vocational school	retiree	Age limit
9	67 years	Male	married	Vocational school	rectifier	Age limit
10	70 years	Male	married	8 grades	retiree	Age limit
11	66 years	male	married	Military school	retiree	Age limit
12	68 years	male	married	10 grades	mechanic	Age limit
13	65 years	female	married	8 grades	textile worker	Age limit
14	68 years	female	married	Post-highschool	medical assistant	Age limit
15	58 years	female	divorced	8 grades	tailor	sickness
16	61 years	female	widowed	highschool	accountant	Age limit
17	63 years	female	married	highschool	accountant	Sickness
18	59 years	female	divorced	highschool	kindergarten teacher	Age limit
19	65 years	Female	married	highschool	cook	Age limit
20	72 years	Female	married	8 grades	care-taker	Pre-retirement
21	84 years	Female	widowed	highschool	accountant	Age limit
22	66 years	Female	married	Higher education	horticulturist engineer	Age limit
23	59 years	Female	married	highschool	chemical operator	Pre-retirement
24	74 years	Female	widowed	highschool	school teacher	Age limit
25	67 years	Female	married	Vocational school	tailor	Age limit
26	58 years	Female	widowed	10 grades	retiree	Pre-retirement
27	66 years	Female	married	8 grades	retiree	Age limit

4. The retiree's life style

a) The importance of the family

For most of the respondents, family remains the reference point of their lives, most answers highlighting the importance of the family in the activities carried out within it.

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	Number
IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AFTER RETIREMENT	Involvement in grandchildren's lives	11
	Increased attention to family	6
	Other activities	5
	Accommodation of spouses to each other	2
	Same as before	3

Table 2 – Importance of the family after retirement

b) The retiree's role in the family

Most elderly people see their life within the life of a family, therefore, ignoring the aspects related to family life means ignoring the most important part of the elderly's life. Keeping in touch with the family is very important, regardless of frequency.

Table 3 – The retiree's role in the family

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	Number
RETIREE'S ROLE IN THE FAMILY	Administrative/household	10
	Educational	5
	Decision making	5
	Advisor	4
	Affective support	3

c) Joys/problems of retirement

Wishing to find out the pleasant and less pleasant parts of retirement, this being one of the most important parts of life, besides school, marriage, birth of children, we asked the following questions: "Which is the most unpleasant side when you are retired? Which is the most pleasant part?"

Table 3 – Unpleasant sides of retirement

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	Females	Males
UNPLEASANT SIDES OF RETIREMENT	Lack of activities/socialization	2	6
	Discrimination	5	-
	Financial status	2	3
	Health problems	2	2
	Perspective of death	3	-
	No sides	1	1

Table 4 – Benefits of retirement

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	females	males
BENEFITS OF RETIREMENT	Family	5	3
	Spare time/freedom	5	3
	Ability to work/health	2	2
	Spare time activities/ socialization	-	4
	Other benefits	3	-

5. Achievements before and after retirement

To observe the differences of joys and satisfaction between the period of employment and the period of retirement, we asked the following associated questions: “Can you list the most important achievements (joys) in your life before retirement? What about those after retirement?” The subcategories formed determined us to present life situations separately from the satisfactions before retirement, and joys and satisfactions after retirement, each of them shaping a category with various subcategories.

Table 5 – Achievements before retirement

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	Number
ACHIEVEMENTS BEFORE RETIREMENT	Family-related achievements	18
	Material achievements	10
	Professional achievements	3
	Social life-related achievements	2
	Hobby-related achievements	2

Table 6 – Achievements after retirement

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	Number
ACHIEVEMENTS AFTER RETIREMENT	Family-related achievements	12
	Material achievements	7
	No achievement	4
	Does not mention	3
	Social life-related achievements	2

6. New acquaintances/new friends after retirement

To identify the socializing level of the elderly in the retirement period, we asked the following associated questions: “Have you met new people after retirement? Have you made new friends?” The resulting subcategories, after answer coding, were Yes or No.

Table 7 – New friends/acquaintances after retirement

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	female	male
NEW FRIENDS/NEW ACQUITANCES	Yes	6	10
	No	9	2
	Total	15	12

7. Social/cultural needs of retirees

As one of the study objectives entailed the identification of the social and cultural needs of the elderly, we asked the question: “Can you mention some social and cultural needs you feel that you have as a retiree?”

Table 8 – Social /cultural needs of the elderly

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORIES	number
SOCIAL/CULTURAL NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY	Culture	10
	Socialization	9
	Information	8
	Organized activities	5
	Health care	2
	Does not have	2
	Has an organized program	1

8. Hobbies of the elderly

One of the premises at the basis of research was the fact that the effects of retirement, as the main period in the life of an individual, can be attenuated by the availability of an extra-professional activity so that, at the moment of retirement, the individual should not feel the lack of professional roles so acutely.

Research (Popovici, 2001) shows that people who prepare for the moment of retirement manage to cope with it more successfully and retirement is no longer considered a loss if the intervention of certain motivational factors is possible, such as the extra-professional activities (hobbies).

Also, to identify the motivations behind the category of “spending free time”, we asked the associated questions: “Do you have a hobby? How long have you had it? How often do you practice it?”

Table 9 – Hobbies of the elderly

CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY	number
HOBBIES OF THE ELDERLY	I have no hobbies	8
	Information	4
	Manual activities	4
	Music auditions	3
	Cultural activities	2
	Others	5
	Civic responsibility	1

We mention that the qualitative research is only a stage in the study carried out on the elderly in the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, as the data obtained on qualitative research have only an orientative value, following that through further research we will complete these results with those of quantitative research, to meet the requirements of validity and fidelity specific to sociological research.

9. Conclusions

Influences on the identity of the elderly are mostly provided by both family and social services. These influences can be both positive and negative, in relation to the approach to the problems that face an elderly person. The family can provide a protective climate of balance by avoiding conflict, psycho-affective traumas, wants and affective frustrations, as well as factors of super and subchallenge, but such a behaviour, which takes over all the tasks of the elderly, can make them feel useless. On the other hand, even though all the social services for the elderly are so organized that they come to their aid, these services can be labelling by their own destination: the elderly, whose subculture may thus be formed.

The main objective of this paper was that of identifying the possibilities of using the elderly as human resource in the family and society, taking into account the present trend of doing away with the state of dependence of the elderly and providing solutions, by identifying active social roles, to keep them within activity - values promoted by the theory of activity.

Analysing the qualitative data of research, we can observe that the elderly can be a valuable resource for both family and community in the society they live in.

They wish to remain active and in touch with the society, taking into account the main needs signalled by them: cultural, socialization and information needs. It is interesting that these needs may be satisfied by the day centres/clubs for the elderly, but which are not accessed by them due to various reasons: they are not interested in the integration into such a collectively or do not know of such a club. The present paper confirms the fact that the elderly can be a valuable resource to both family and society.

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