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Socio-psychological characteristics of Lviv University of the Third Age listeners adaptability

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Abstract

The paper deals with investigations of social-psychological adaptability peculiarities of elderly people in Lviv (Ukraine). These personal performances are compared for the people who study and those who are not L'viv University of Third Age (LUTA) listeners. The results of investigation have shown that participation of elderly people in LUTA allows them to decrease the solitude feeling and to increase the socio-psychological adaptability as well as the stress resistance level.

Key words: social-psychological adaptability, elderly people, University of Third Age.

Introduction

Demographic data shows that the number of elderly people in the general population structure of Ukraine is constantly increasing. Nowadays every fifth citizen of Ukraine is 60 years old. Thus, there is a burning issue regarding the research not only medical and social (Cf. Bacman 2003, Veselkova, Zemlyanova 2003), but also the psychological aspects of elderly people's problems (Cf. Krasnova 2003, Mustakas 2003, Maksymova 1999, Marcynkovsjka 2003, S. Miller 2002). Retirement, loss of relatives and friends, diseases, narrowing of the communication circle and sphere of activities – all these things lead to life impoverishment, positive impressions and emotions decrease, feelings of being lonely and unnecessary increase. Moreover, the elderly can barely endure the aging and physiological changes that occur in their bodies. These changes are often accompanied by various diseases, that together with the socio-psychological difficulties, create excessive negative feelings in the form of depression, anxiety, despair, etc. (Cf. Obuhova 2003, Pyzanova 1998, Tacsheva 2003). The necessity to find adequate areas of activity for elderly people is connected with the fact that elderly people's social activity peak coincides with pre-retirement period (men: 60-62 years old, women: 55-60 years old). This fact strengthens the tension that appears regarding the unavoidable decrease in activity level and employment situation. Common activity that has a social importance restores the autonomy and independence of the elderly, compensates for the personal social potential decrease and is why in the period running up to the old age, people aspire to social activity in life (Kobylarek 2010).

Recently, mature aged people have a possibility to study at L'viv University of the Third Age that gives them an opportunity to feel themselves in the role of students. **The basis of** our research is to find the differences in elderly people's adaptability to study and who do not get the appropriate form of study.

The **objective of** the research is to generalize the peculiarities of the socio-psychological adaptability of elderly people who study and those who are not L'viv University of Third Age listeners.

In the process of research the following methods have been used: the method of the behavioral activity type determination by L.I. Vasserman and N.V. Gumenuk (TBA), the method of the subjective solitude state level diagnostics by D. Rassel and M. Ferguson, the method of the stress resistance and social adaptation determination by T. Holms and R. Rahe, and the method of the socio-psychological adaptability diagnostics by C. Rogers and R. Dymond (SPA). The STATISTICA 8.036 package is used for the statistical processing of the obtained results.

The research group consisted of 44 persons of between 60-80 years of age from L'viv University of the Third Age (LUTA) and 46 elderly persons from the Pension Fund of Ukraine of L'viv Halyts'kyi District Department who study in LUTA.

Analysis and research results interpretation

While processing the results, the group of LUTA listeners is considered to be "group 1", and the elderly people group who do not study as "group 2".

While processing the results obtained in the process of the empirical research according to the C. Rogers and R. Dymond method, the differences of adaptability indicators mean value in the LUTA listeners group (group 1) and the elderly people group, who do not study (group 2) are found (Fig.1).

The adaptability mean indicators of the Group 1 (135.6) are significantly higher than in Group 2 (92.8). This shows that elderly persons, who study at the LUTA have the higher ability to adapt to the unsteady conditions and to the changes in the environment than the elderly people group who do not study.

Fig.1 The „adaptability" mean indicators in the LUTA listeners group (Ad_gr1) and the elderly people group who do not study (Ad_gr2).

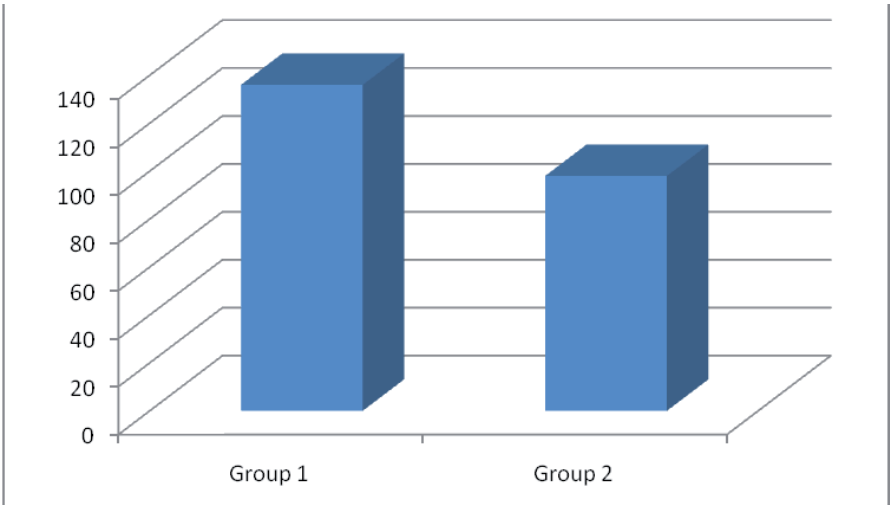
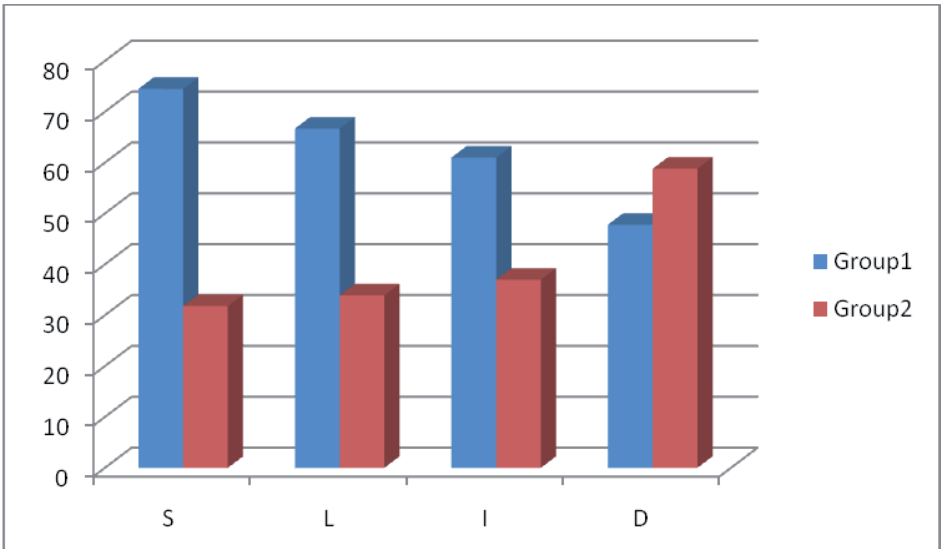


Fig.2 Mean indicators scale of "self-acceptance" (S), "acceptance of others" (L), "emotional comfort" (E), "internality" (I), "striving for dominance" (D) in the UTAL listeners group (gr.1) and in the elderly people group who do not study.



We can make the same conclusions on the basis of comparison in the research elderly people groups of integral indicators of separate SPA methods scales by C. Rogers and R. Dymond: namely, "self-acceptance", "acceptance of others", "emotional comfort", "internality", "striving for dominance" (Fig.2)

According to Fig.2, the indicators on the "self-acceptance" scale in the Group 1 are higher that in the Group 2. The LUTA listeners group has the higher self-acceptance indicators through the acceptance of themselves and their individuality, attitude to themselves as to the personality that deserves attention and can make the independent choice, belief in themselves and their possibilities. The lower indicators on the "self-acceptance" scale in the elderly people group who do not study in LUTA are stipulated by the realization of their dependence on other people and the fear of their deprecation. Such persons withdraw into themselves, are afraid of going out and making close interpersonal contacts.

It is found that the indicators on the "acceptance of others" are twice as high in Group 1 (66.72) as compared with Group 2 (33.87). The LUTA listeners group is characterized by the ability to like and perceive other people as they are. They do not intend to control other people, and respect their freedom. On the contrary, the non-acceptance of other people is typical for the elderly people group who do not study (Group 2), and they deprecate, criticize and strive to control other people's behavior.

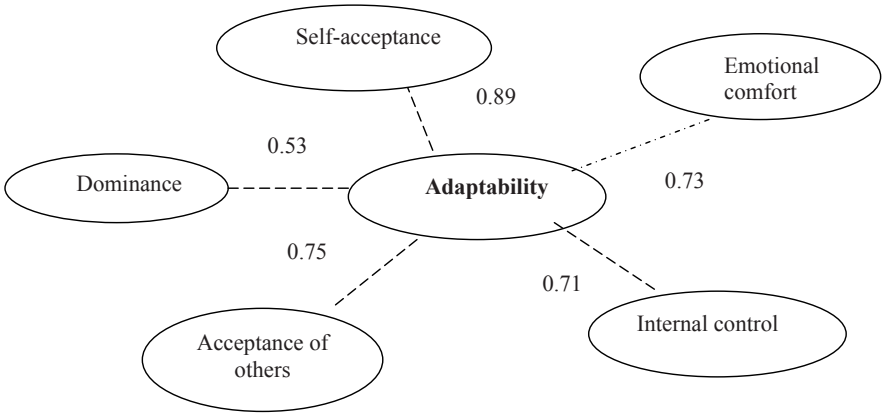
The emotional comfort level in the LUTA listeners group is higher that in the group that do not study. In such a way, that elderly people that study have a high psycho-emotional comfort degree which is characterized by emotional labiality, stability, positive emotional tone and mood.

The "internality" scale indicators are higher in the LUTA listeners group (60.9) than in the elderly people group that do not study (37.12) Group 1 representatives are inclined to lay the responsibility for life events and activity results on themselves, and not to external factors unlike Group 2 that get used to swimming with the stream and blame everybody around them for their life troubles, but never themselves.

According to Fig.2, research Group 2 are more inclined to dominance, to the striving for controlling others, while Group 1 representatives are inclined to compromise and unselfishness.

The results of the conducted correlational analysis confirm the above formulated regularity.

Fig.3 Correlational connections between the "adaptability" scale and the method scales of socio-psychological adaptability diagnostics by Rogers and Dymond in the LUTA listeners group.



In the LUTA listeners group the statistically significant direct correlational connections of "adaptability" scales with the "self-acceptance" scales (r = 0.89), "acceptance of others" (r = 0.75), "emotional comfort" (r = 0.73), "internal control" (r = 0.71) and "dominance" (r = 0.53) are found when the significance level is $p < 0.01$ (Fig. 3).

In group 2 (Fig.4) the statistically significant direct correlational connections are found when the significance level is $p < 0.01$ of the "adaptability" scale with the "emotional discomfort" scales (r =0.55) and "subordination" (r = 0.47).

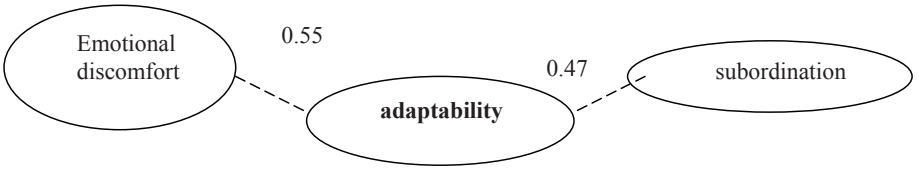
The adaptability level in the Group 2 representatives is low because they are inclined to the dominant position. The adaptation to social life inclines them to be subordinated which contradicts their innate attitude and induces great emotional discomfort (Fig.4). On the contrary, considerably lower domination level in the LUTA listeners allows them to adapt to life circumstances controlling any dominant position and to retention of their comfortable feelings. (Fig.3)

In such a way, on the basis of the conducted analysis we can make some practical conclusions:

1) LUTA is a means to increase the socio-psychological adaptability level of the elderly;

2) The key obstacle for the entering into the LUTA for the elderly people is their high level of domination and, accordingly, their low level of acceptance of other people.

Fig.4. The correlational connections between the "adaptability" scale and the socio-psychological adaptability diagnostics methods scales by Rogers and Dymond in the elderly people group that do not study.



The research results analysis according to the method of the subjective solitude state level diagnostics by D. Russel and M. Ferguson and the method of the stress resistance and social adaptation determination by T. Holms and R. Rahe allows us to determine the range of benefits of the participation of the elderly in LUTA.

Thus, the mean value of the change "the solitude level" in group 1 is equal to 17. 24 and in group 2 – 39.86, where the value of the t-criteria equals to 7.31 when the t-criteria significance level is p = 0. The subjective solitude state occurs among the elderly people that do not study twice that of LUTA listeners group. The elderly people that do not study very often endure the subjective solitude psychological state that is closely connected to the monotonous communication with relatives while the LUTA listeners interact actively within the social environment within LUTA and family, they can organize their time constitutively (communication with family and friends, time for hobbies and studying, etc.).

Moreover, the stress resistance level in the LUTA listeners group is twice as high as in the elderly people group that do not study. It is closely connected to the specific behavior activity type well-known according to the L. I. Vasserman and N.V. Humenyuk method.

The mean value of the "behavior activity type" in group 1 equals to 432.13 and in group 2 – 318.3, where the t-criteria value is equal to 3.12, when the t-criteria significance level is p = 0. The excellent behavior activity types are found in two groups. Such types of behavior activity as **AB** ("balanced" personality) and **B1** (rational, careful, slow personality with the moderate activity) are typical for the LUTA listeners group. On the contrary, such types of behavior activity as **A1** (energetic person that strives for competitive relationships), **A** (hyperactive, very energetic, impatient, impulsive personality); **B** (diffident personality) and **B1** are typical for the elderly people group that do not study.

The **A** behavior activity type that is typical for the elderly people group who do not study is characterized by exaggerated need for activity. Such people have high progress motivation, persistency, a strong feeling of lack of time, and impatience. Their language is energetic and emotionally distinct that is strengthened by gestures and mime. Such persons are inclined to competition, competitiveness

and recognition. In situations of lack of information, or in cases for a necessity of quick decision making, the reactive alarm sounds , the loss of situation control is possible and may lead to emotional instability, stress resistance decrease and behavior control decrease in general.

The **B** behavior type in the group of people that do not study is characterized by the pronounced sluggishness, carefulness and rationalism in work and other spheres of life, devotion to the opted business, aspiration for a change of work. They are constrained in their movements and in manifestations of emotional reactions and feelings. Such elderly people think for very long period of time over activity plans, followed by slow and extremely meticulous accomplishment even in small details that very often annoys those around them. For instance, clumsiness and unwillingness to change the activity, stereotypes that quickly make for difficulties in adaptation to situations that require quick decision making or the change of working practice. The relative resistance to frustrating and stressmaking situations and circumstances, however, under the constant influence of these factors it has the effect of depressing reaction and the loss of interest in work and communication is manifested.

The tendency to the **B1** behavior type is typical for Group 1 and 2. In this case, the elderly people are characterized by: rationalism and sluggishness in business and communication, the combinability of intensive work with work, and relaxation. There is visible external continence in the movements and language that is combined with self-control and the imperturbability in case of failure or communication with the unpleasant and awkward speaker; the resistance to activity of frustrating situations and circumstances, internal emotional stability and continence in the affection and feeling manifestations towards other people.

The tendency to the **A1** behavior activity type is typical for the elderly group that is characterized by increased business activity, persistence, enthusiasm for work, and purposefulness. Their language and expressions are very energetic and distinct. They have emotionally-saturated lives, ambition, intention to success and leadership, and they are unsatisfied by their achievements, that is why they want to improve the results of work performed all the time; they are also sensitive to compliments and criticism; their mood and behavior may be very changeable in stressful situations. They strive for contested activity, but without arrogance and aggression; if there are circumstances that obstruct their plan accomplishment, their anxiety quickly reappears, their self-control level is decreased, but they are transcended by volitional effort.

The **AB** behavior activity type is very typical for the LUTA listeners group. The people, detected with the transitional behavior activity type **AB**, are characterized by active and purposeful efficiency, different kinds of interests, they know how to balance their business activity and change the stressful job to something easier or by organized rest; their actions and language expression are moderately pronounced. The AB types are not inclined to the dominance, but under some circumstances they take charge onto themselves and play the leader's role; their emotional stability and predictable behavior, their relative resistance to the stressful situations, their good adjustment to different kinds of activity – all these characteristics are typical for them.

Thus, the LUTA listeners are characterized by the high adaptability level to different kinds of activities. They are energetic persons who strive for competitive relationships, without arrogance and aggressiveness, but with increased business activity. However, it is hard to adapt to the social environment changes for the elderly people that do not study. These people are hyperactive, very energetic, impatient and impulsive in their actions.

Conclusion

The peculiarities of socio-psychological adaptability of the elderly people who study in the Third Age L'viv University and those who are not university listeners are found on the basis of empirical research.

For the LUTA listeners the high adaptability level, acceptance of other people, emotional comfort, ascribing the responsibility according to the results of the activity to their skills and efforts (internal control), the dominance position and leader behavior and skill to resolve the everyday problems of life through active interaction and cooperation with other people is typical. On the contrary, it is typical for the elderly people who do not study to have low self-acceptance level, and acceptance of the other people, ascribing responsibility according to the results of activity to their skills and efforts (internal control), low stress resistance level as an indicator of psychologically adaptable possibilities decrease of the personality and with considerable contribution of destructive behavior activity in the form of hyperactive, highly energetic, impatient and impulsive behavior or behavior that demonstrates diffidence in their efforts, with constant doubts while decision making, with the responsibility avoidance, and passive reaction on the social environment incentives.

The common feature for both researched groups is the fact that the adaptability is stipulated by the skill to perceive other people in the way that they are, and ascribing the responsibility according to the results of their skills and efforts activity. The different feature is the fact that in the LUTA listeners group the socio-psychological adaptability is stipulated by highly adjustable indicators to changeable social environment conditions, skill to resolve problems and overcome difficulties in life in the process of interaction with society. On the contrary, in the elderly people group that do not study their inadaptability is pronounced through low stress resistance level which in future may be a precondition to hard psychosomatic disease and destructive behavior activity that is excessively hyperactive or excessively passive in their interaction with the social environment.

On the basis of the conducted analysis we can make some practical conclusions:

- LUTA is a means to increase the socio-psychological adaptability level of the elderly people;
- LUTA is a means to decrease the solitude feeling and increase the stress resistance level in the elderly;
- Studying in LUTA influences adequate behavior reactions to changeable life circumstances which in general increase the self-acceptance level, and the emotional comfort feeling in the elderly;

- The key obstacle for the entering into the LUTA for elderly people is the high dominant level and, accordingly, the low level of the acceptance of other people.

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