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COMPARISON OF THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF LEARNERS AT THE UNIVERSITIES OF THE THIRD AGE IN UKRAINE AND POLAND

ABSTRACT

The author presents the results of surveys of elderly people conducted in Ukraine and Poland. Among the urgent problems that concern Ukrainian elderly people are: health, loneliness, lack of work that would bring satisfaction, the loss of loved ones, the unsettled life of their children, as well as the political and economic situation in the country. Educational needs were not raised in these studies. In Poland, surveys of the learners at the Universities of the Third Age (U3As) are often conducted. Most respondents perceive old age as another stage of life that can be used for their development rather than a period of illness and loneliness. The researchers were interested in motivation of elderly people to studying at U3A. The prevailing responses included the desire to expand their knowledge and intensify intellectual development, maintain relationships with people of the same age group, be physically fit, have fun, fulfill their youthful dream of education etc. Most respondents indicated the relationship between studying at the U3A and improving the quality of life. The presented results of the Polish research, in contrast to the Ukrainian one, clearly confirm the positive impact of U3A on the formation of the elderly's quality of life. Positive feedback testifies about active and qualitative aging of the people, for whom activity, optimism and openness to others are very important issues. The author conducted her own survey on the educational needs of the elderly in Ukraine. It has been found out that 65% of elderly people have not heard about the existence of U3As in Ukraine. Only 47% of respondents want to study, while 53 % do not have this desire for various reasons. This necessitates some measures to promote and extend the activities of U3As in Ukraine.

Keywords: adult education, University of the Third Age (U3A), survey, the elderly, Poland, quality of life, learners.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Автор представляє результати опитувань людей похилого віку, проведених в Україні і Республіці Польща. Серед проблем, що турбують українських людей похилого віку, на першому місці є: стан здоров'я, самотність, відсутність роботи, яка б приносила задоволення, втрата близьких і рідних людей, необлаштоване життя їхніх дітей, а також політична та економічна ситуація в країні. Питання освітніх потреб в цих дослідженнях не піднімалися. З'ясовано, що у Республіці Польща часто проводиться опитування слухачів університетів третього віку. Більшість респондентів сприймають старість не як період хвороб і самотності, а як наступний етап життя, який можна використати для свого розвитку. Дослідників цікавить, що спонукає людей похилого віку навчатися в університетих третього віку. Переважали такі відповіді: бажання розширити свої знання та підтримати інтелектуальний розвиток, підтримувати стосунки з людьми тієї ж



вікової групи, залишатися у гарній фізичній формі, цікаво проводити вільний час, здійснити свою юнацьку мрію про освіту та ін. Більшість респондентів вказують на взаємозв'язок між навчанням в університеті третього віку та покращенням якості життя. Представлені результати польських досліджень, на відміну від українських, чітко підтверджують позитивний вплив університетів третього віку на формування якості життя людей похилого віку. Позитивні відгуки свідчать про якісне старіння аудиторії, для якої активність, оптимізм та відкритість до інших є дуже важливими питаннями. Автором проведено власне опитування щодо освітніх потреб літніх людей в Україні. Виявлено, що 65 % людей похилого віку не чули про існування в Україні університетів третього віку. Мають бажання навчатися лише 47 % опитаних, натомість 53 % з різних причин не хочуть навчатися. Це свідчить про необхідність популяризації та розширення діяльності університетів третього віку в Україні.

Ключові слова: освіта дорослих, університет третього віку, опитування, люди похилого віку, Республіка Польща, якість життя, слухачі університетів.

INTRODUCTION

A characteristic feature of the current demographic situation in the world is the low birth rate and the growing number of the elderly. According to international statistics, today one in ten inhabitants of the Earth is 60 years old and older. By 2050, one in five will be in their sixties, and by 2150, one-third of the world's population will have reached that age. The general trend of population aging, declining birth rates both in Ukraine and around the world generates the need to provide appropriate living conditions. In the developed countries of the world, this problem has been solved for many decades and there are significant positive achievements in its solution, in particular, in terms of financial and social provision. At present, state policies of these countries are aimed primarily at meeting educational and developmental needs of the elderly. For this reason, U3As, which are organized to teach and develop their learners, have been functioning for many years.

In contrast, in Ukraine, despite all the ongoing pension reforms, the standards of living of the elderly remain extremely poor. Low pensions, high retirement age, lack of funds to pay pensions, changes in a person's social status related primarily with the termination or limitation of employment, the transformation of holistic guidelines, the very way of life and communication, the need for social and psychological adaptation to new conditions – this is not a complete list of problems facing the state and its citizens. The results of research by the Institute of Demography of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine show that only 1 % of the elderly are practically healthy and do not have chronic diseases. One in five people over the age of 60 lives alone, and one in ten is unable to take care of themselves. 5–6 % of retirees are bedridden people (Instytut demografii i sotsialnykh doslidzhen, 2021).

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The paper is aimed at conducting a comparative analysis of the educational needs of learners at the U3As in Ukraine and Poland. Besides, in the context of the study, our own survey has been conducted and the results are presented in the paper.

THEORETICAL BASIS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

Analysis of reference materials shows that scientists are paying more attention to the needs of the elderly and providing their lifelong learning. These issues are studied from different perspectives: philosophical (G. Abramova, V. Alperovich, O. Kozlov, O. Leaders,



R. Yatsemirskaya, etc.); legal (V. Andreev, N. Bolotina, O. Ganechko, O. Kuchma, S. Prilipko, B. Stashkiv, O. Tishchenko, V. Shcherbyna, O. Yaroshenko, etc.); social (E. Libanova, O. Komarova, S. Kravtsov, A. Lobanova, L. Stadnyk, Y. Tkachenko, L. Yegorova, I. Yevdokimova, etc.); psychological (O. Bogomolets, V. Frolkis, I. Mechnikov etc.); pedagogical (O. Anishchenko, O. Banit, M. Gavran, L. Lukyanova, etc.).

Nevertheless, the issue of solving educational needs is rarely raised, so one of the main tasks in Ukraine is to create decent conditions for the elderly to realize the concept of lifelong learning.

RESULTS

It is a proven fact that change of a social status of a person in old age negatively affects their moral state and financial security, negatively affects the mental state, reduces resistance to disease and adaptation to changes in the environment. Previous surveys in Ukraine were mainly focused on such kinds of needs. Thus, in 2010 the Ukrainian National News Agency conducted a survey among the elderly "What upsets Ukrainians?". The survey involved 2,000 respondents aged 18 and older. The results are the following: only 7 % of respondents over the age of 60 do not feel upset in life and all other elderly people begin to worry about the unsettled life of children, relationships with them; health is gradually coming to the fore – 37 % of respondents aged 50–59 and 67 % over 60 are most upset about their health; loneliness and relationships with children are increasingly frustrating; the state of their housing and income level are less frustrating; older people (50–59 years) are much less upset by the lack of work that would bring pleasure (Lyudey pokhyloho viku zasmuchuye samotnist, 2010). It should be mentioned that educational needs in this study were not considered.

In 2015, the All-Ukrainian charity Care for the Elderly in Ukraine conducted another survey to find out which issues are of utmost concern to the elderly and which rights they consider the most important. The questionnaire consisted of 5 questions: the first and the second were purely statistical in nature, and the next three questions presupposed answer options that had to be evaluated according to the suggested scale. At the beginning of February 2015, 970 completed questionnaires were received. 71 % of respondents were women and 29 % were men. The age of most respondents was 70–80 years. As in 2010, the results showed that the majority of elderly Ukrainians surveyed were most concerned about their own health. They were also concerned about the problems their children faced. The loss of loved ones, as well as the political and economic situation in the country were distressing for them. Unfortunately, even 5 years later, the issues of education and training were not raised either (Opytuvannya Vseukrayinskoyi blahodiynoyi orhanizatsiyi "Turbota pro litnikh v Ukrayini", 2018).

Further research was conducted at the Kamyanets-Podilsky City Center for Social Services "Longevity". The respondents were selected in accordance with the purpose and objectives of the empirical study on a voluntary basis, and 30 elderly people (15 men and 15 women) were chosen for the sample. To achieve the goals of the empirical research and hypothesis testing, the following diagnostic tools were developed: a test questionnaire with 17 closed-ended questions that provided answers: yes, no, often, rarely, sometimes. There was also a questionnaire form to determine the adaptation process of the elderly, covering 20 closed-ended and open questions (Sotsialno-psykholohichni osoblyvosti perezhyvannya samotnosti lyudmy pokhyloho viku, 2017).

The study found that 7 % of men and 3% of women had never felt lonely. The other 20 % of men and 35 % of women felt lonely very often, or even constantly. Only 15 % of



men and 20 % of women sometimes felt lonely. The obtained data show the predominance of a high level of loneliness experienced by the elderly (55 %). According to the analysis of the main causes of loneliness, it was found out that 25% of men and 20 % of women lacked a loved one, 5 % of men and 25 % of women lacked true friendship, 10 % of men and 10 % of women lacked the attention and care of relatives (children, grandchildren). Only 2 % of men and 3% of women lacked friendly and compassionate attitude from others (Sotsialno-psykholohichni osoblyvosti perezhyvannya samotnosti lyudmy pokhyloho viku, 2017). As the survey suggests, educational needs of the elderly were not of particular interest.

Meanwhile, similar surveys have been conducted in Poland. Many Polish researchers are trying to determine the quality of life of the elderly. An important study was conducted by Wrublewska and Blaszcak in December 2011 among 114 learners of the U3As in Wrocław. The majority of respondents were women (68.4 %) aged 60–79 years. It turned out that old age was perceived primarily as another stage of life by 76.3 % of respondents and only 5.2 % of people said that it was a period of illness. These results indicate the optimism of the elderly. 65.7 % of respondents also mentioned that physical activity definitely improved their well-being. They claimed that they spent their free time mainly on travel (52.6 %) and hobbies (44.7 %) (Rol universytetiv tretoho viku u formuvanni yakosti zhyttya lyudey pokhyloho viku ta upravlinnya chasom, 2019).

Besides, in this survey, researchers were interested in motives behind elderly people's desire to study at the U3A. 81.5 % of respondents had desire to extend their knowledge and encourage intellectual development. More than half of the respondents, namely 55.2 %, said that their goal was to maintain relationships with people of the same age group. 44.7 % wanted to stay in good physical shape, 36.8 % wanted to spend free time with pleasure, 26.3 % wanted to feel competent regardless of the age, 21.0 % were eager to realize their youthful dream of education, and 10.5 % wanted to get rid of loneliness. Half of the respondents stated that due to attending classes at the U3A they had new interests or an opportunity to develop current ones. Only 7.8 % responded that activities at the U3A did not affect the development of their knowledge (Dopovid pro doslidzhennya "Rol universytetiv tretoho viku v protsesi kulturnoyi aktyvizatsiyi lyudey pokhyloho viku", 2016). Most of the research was conducted among people who came from large cities, had higher education and were still married, which seems to be of additional importance for evaluation of the old age. Respondents were active both intellectually and physically, willingly participated in excursions offered by the U3A (Borchyk, 2013). Researchers made a hypothesis that activities of the U3A were aimed at prevention and overcoming the alienation of the elderly. Thus, these universities encouraged old people to perceive old age naturally and treat it mainly as another stage of their life. Studies have confirmed this hypothesis. Researchers point out that activity plays an important role because it promotes a positive life outlook. Responding to questions about the future, respondents said they were not worried (Yakhimovych & Nalepa, 2012). Vrublewska and Blaschak proved that there is a need for establishing and functioning of U3As. They also proved the correctness of their general assumptions concerning the relationship between U3As and meeting the needs of the elderly concerning self-education, extending knowledge and skills, carrying out socially useful activities, recognition of oneself as a part of society or a group, spending leisure time, encouraging social relations and mental and physical stimulation (Rol universytetiv tretoho viku u formuvanni yakosti zhyttya lyudey pokhyloho viku ta upravlinnya chasom, 2019).

Thus, in 2019, the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) conducted a number of surveys. It was defined that at the moment of the research there were 640 U3As, 80 of



them were located in the Masovian Voivodeship. 71.9 % of learners of the U3As were people aged 61–75 years; 50.5 % of them had secondary education; 87.9 % were retired. In terms of ownership, 56 % of U3As operated within the structure of non-governmental organizations. Among them 44.7 % were associations established solely for the purpose of U3A management. 21.5 % of U3As function at the universities, and 17.7 % operate at cultural centers.

What concerns personal life of respondents, 66 % of them have friends besides their family and often visit them. 11 % visit their friends and family once a week or more often, and 37 % do it 1-3 times a month. However, about 18% of the elderly hardly meet their friends. Nevertheless, thanks to friends and family, the elderly feel financially secure in difficult situations. As many as 91 % say they can rely on their friends and family (Rol universytetiv tretoho viku u formuvanni yakosti zhyttya lyudey pokhyloho viku ta upravlinnya chasom, 2019).

The presented results of Polish research, in contrast to the Ukrainian one, clearly confirm the positive impact of U3As on the formation of qualitative life of the elderly. Most respondents claim that there is relationship between studying at U3A and improving the quality of life. Positive feedback testifies about pleasant aging of the respondents, for whom activity, optimism and openness to others are very important issues.

We also conducted a survey to identify the educational needs of the elderly in Ukraine. The sample included 17 women aged 59 to 84, who were asked 8 closed-ended questions. Among them 41 % are residents of rural areas and 59 % are urban residents. The vast majority of residents have secondary education (58 %); 30 % of respondents received higher education, and 12% did not complete higher education. Unfortunately, it is not comforting that 65 % of elderly people have not heard about the existence of U3As in Ukraine, 35 % know what they are; 47 % want to study at U3As whereas 53 % do not want to. Respondents who are willing to study defined the areas that are of peculiar interest to them: physical activity and health maintaining – 58 %, computer literacy - 47%, law – 29 %, psychology – 29 %, healthy eating – 29 %, gardening and horticulture - 12%, decorative and applied arts – 12 %, learning foreign languages – 6 %, financial literacy – 6 %, no special interest – 23 %. When asked how much time they were willing to devote to studying, 29 % responded that they were ready to attend classes every day; 29% were ready to do it once a week; 29 % answered that they could not allocate time for regular studying and 3 % were ready to attend classes 2 times a month. It is extremely gratifying that 70 % of respondents were in good health to attend university whereas 30 % couldn't do it because of illness (Sotsialna aktyvnist lyudey pokhyloho viku 2014–2020 rr., 2020).

However, given the current processes in the world education, the trends, forms and means of education are changing accordingly, which in turn requires further research and improvement of the learning process at the U3As. In Ukraine, special importance of education for the elderly is caused by the transition from the concept of “learning for the whole life” to the concept of “learning during the whole life”, which is a feature of the education system in the information society. It necessitates the adaptation of this fast growing age group to quick economic and social changes, helping them to overcome the problems of loneliness, redundancy and social isolation.

CONCLUSIONS

An indicator of efficiency and quality of the elderly's education is the manifestation of their active life position, inclination to self-education, self-development, maintaining positive world outlook, the desire to lead a healthy lifestyle, interest in



innovation. Research conducted in Poland shows that most learners at the U3As are active participants in learning, interested in attending classes and self-study, able to perceive the new and pass on their experience, especially to the younger generation of learners. This suggests that U3As can be characterized as one of the effective models of integration of the elderly in modern society, which, by enhancing their lives in general, improves the quality of life and thus contributes to solving the demographic problem of active aging. Our study does not cover all aspects of the problem. Further scientific research must be carried out in terms of theoretical and experimental studies of the impact of studying on the physiological and psychological state of the elderly; search for new ways, forms, and methods of organizing educational activities at the U3As; solving problems of training specialists for teaching the elderly, etc.

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