

PREPARATION FOR OLD AGE AS PART OF THE ADAPTATION TO OLD AGE

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Abstract: Preparation for old age as part of lifelong development and education represents one effective tool for ageing successfully. Its aspects lead to a successful life at retirement age and they improve the quality of life for ageing people. In our study, we pay attention mainly to the psychological - andragogical aspects which influence the preparation for old age (adaptation to old age, adaptation strategies, successful versus unsuccessful ageing, and possibilities of andragogical intervention in the area of preparation for ageing and old age). These psychological - andragogical phenomena create conditions for successful ageing. In our project VEGA no. 1/0001/18 called *Preparation for ageing and old age - possibilities of andragogical intervention*, we focus on the period of older adulthood and senior age. We think that education and its programmes can be used also in the preparation for ageing in this target group.

Key words: older adulthood, seniors, education, successful ageing, adaptation, adaptation strategies, personal adaptation;

1 Introduction

Many current conceptions of successful ageing emphasize maintaining a decent amount of activity. Negative impact of inactivity, motivational and emotional deprivation are much more evident at old age and they lead to faster involuntary changes. Inactivity is pathogenic not only at the physical level, but also at the psychological and social levels. Research (Langmeier & Krejčířová, 1998) supports the idea that adequate activation can help older people to achieve a performance in the tests of fluid intelligence that is fully comparable to the performances of many younger people. We agree with Vágnerová (2000) that personal development can continue at old age, as well as wisdom achieved with experience. There are people who start learning a new language, Braille alphabet or working with a PC at old age. When old age occurs, there are many psychological changes that depend on biological, as well as socio-cultural aspects. However, the time when these changes, their dynamics and reactions start to become evident, are individually differentiated.

On the other hand, old age brings along the period of the biggest life crisis. Older people are no longer performing their professional roles and they start losing their previously acquired contacts. Their perspectives and value systems undergo many changes as well. They have to accept many changes, such as leaving of children from home, the death of the life partner, friends and acquaintances. All these situations increase their social isolation. Their financial situation changes as well, their health condition is worsened and they are not able to look after themselves. In this way, their quality of life is worsened, too (Balogová, 2005).

Bromley (1974) says that disappointment felt throughout the period of late adulthood and old age can be the result of several causes:

- *unfavourable physiological changes and restriction of activity;*
- *overload at work;*
- *inability to overcome a lower level of professional aspirations;*
- *worsening of the quality of life;*
- *inability to keep in touch with the scientific, technical, cultural and social progress which results in the feeling of being out of date;*
- *lack of contacts;*
- *loss of energy and freedom;*
- *unpleasant perspectives for the future at old age;*

- *loss of important emotional relationships (death of close people);*
- *difficult problems and situations. These are often caused by others and there is no possibility to avoid them, etc.*

These changes in life should be gradual and not forced, therefore there is a need for preparation for ageing, retirement and senior age. Based on her theoretical and empirical research, Balogová (2005) proposed a system of purposeful preparation for retirement (preparation for all society, preparation for companies, social preparation). Her research from 2013 confirmed that the group of prepared seniors achieved a higher quality of life in several aspects than the group of seniors who were not prepared for ageing. Prepared seniors showed higher personal life satisfaction, higher levels of positive emotions, and higher satisfaction with life in Slovakia. The research also confirmed a higher quality of life for prepared seniors from the point of view of demographic aspects (gender, living, health condition, financial situation).

According to several research findings (Határ, 2013), education for seniors and their surroundings is perceived as:

- *prevention against social segregation of seniors;*
- *prevention against psycho-somatic diseases;*
- *a tool for elimination of consequences of diseases;*
- *a tool for creating a society that is based on knowledge;*
- *a way of personal development and maintaining personal activity;*
- *a meaning of life for seniors;*
- *a way to solve real or possible problems of seniors;*
- *a tool for elimination of ageing processes;*
- *a tool for forming new patterns of behaviour in intra- and intergenerational communication;*
- *a tool for social mobility of seniors;*
- *a tool for improving the quality of life for seniors, etc.*

Balogová (2005) says that management of human resources starts to become more important in Slovakia. However, attention is paid mainly to employees at young and middle ages, and only very seldom it is aimed at older population. For this reason, we focus on the older adulthood and senior age when solving the project VEGA no. 1/0001/18 called *Preparation for ageing and old age - possibilities of andragogical intervention*.

2 Adaptation to old age

Adaptation is considered to be one of the basic social-psychological mechanisms of socialization. Adaptation is a concept that expresses a dynamic process how people adapt to their surroundings. The result of this process is their state of being adapted (Machalová, 2017). A decisive factor is the activity that people must do in order to overcome previous patterns of behaviour. They need to acquire new ones that will help them to cope with new situations. They cannot accept living conditions only in a passive way. They must try to adapt to these conditions with their personal needs, hobbies, values and aims. In these assimilation processes, people try to modify their surroundings so that they are more suitable and less stressful for them. In accommodation processes, people try to accept all conditions and requirements of their surroundings because their change could mean excessive or useless effort for them (Kubáni, 2005). Social - psychological adaptation is connected with the psychological and social development. The social level of people depends on the social level of surroundings they live in. Their adaptation to the specific social reality is beneficial for their psychological and social development (Machalová, 2017). The concept of adaptability is also related to the adaptation. Adaptability represents individual assumptions of people when they cope with changes of outer surroundings. It is created in the process of personal development and its basis is the plasticity of the nervous system and the psychological activity, in general (Kubáni, 2011). The level of adaptation can be expressed in the

following ranges: suitable - unsuitable (Provazník et al., 2002, in: Kubáni, 2011), good /optimal - bad (Bromley, 1974). These are the basic features of adaptation: life optimism, a realistic attitude to new conditions, a realistic perception of oneself, a realistic self-evaluation, social and emotional maturity, self-acceptance, adequate self-control (Provazník et al, 2002, in: Kubáni, 2011).

According to Balogová (2005), the proper problem of adaptation to old age begins when people realize that they are getting old. Several factors influence the process of adaptation. Attitudes to old age depend on the personality, temperament and level of adaptability (Hrozenská 2008, in: Sabolová Fabianová & Žiaková, 2019). In addition to their personalities and physical conditions, there are also social factors such as social atmosphere, family, preferred lifestyle, retirement and change of the social status, and the loss of the life partner. All these factors contribute to a better or worse process of adaptation. However, there can occur such a situation that somebody will not adapt to old age at all. In such case we talk about the maladaptation or about the maladaptive geriatric syndrome (Balogová, 2005). For this reason, we can agree that the main task of old age is the acceptance of these limitations and irreversible changes in such a way that people are able to keep their minds and bodies fresh, maintain their activity, accept new and adequate aspirations to their personal possibilities. They should try to maintain their personal continuity and live this life period as a natural termination of their unique life stories (Árochová 2001, in: Sabolová Fabianová & Žiaková, 2019).

The study of Reichard (1962, in: Bromley, 1974) describes five strategies how to cope with the fact of getting old. Every type represents a composed factography and identified personal characteristic features express the probability of belonging to one type of these strategies. Bromley (1974) says that each type has something in common with one or more strategies. It means that these types of personalities represent relatively frequent patterns of adaptation, but they are not exclusive nor restrictive categories. There can be differences even within one type of a particular strategy:

Constructive strategy is getting close to the ideal standard of adaptation of older people. The result can be seen in well-balanced seniors who are neither afraid nor neurotic. They enjoy life and they establish friendly relationships with other people. They have a sense of humour, they are tolerant, adaptable, and self-confident. They are aware of their mistakes and perspectives. These people are quite satisfied with their success. They are assertive, but not aggressive. They are able to express their emotions adequately, they can control themselves and they do not feel restricted. They can understand the mistakes of other people. They accept all aspects of old age, including the leaving from work and retirement. They accept death without feeling hopeless. These seniors have a constructive and optimistic attitude to life that is open for the future. They have a good health condition and they are independent in the given situation. They have a stable character and they act responsibly. They follow their long-term aims and they want to achieve long-term success. Therefore, these seniors are able to plan and foresee their future. For this reason, they are able to cope with temporary failures, worries and disappointment. Their ambitions are meaningful and purposeful. They have stable and friendly relationships. They have overcome all unfriendly emotions to people who hurt them in the past. These seniors are satisfied and self-confident. They can rely on the support of other people around them. They know that there are not many things to regret. They are optimistic about their future.

Strategy of dependence is also socially acceptable. However, this strategy leads to passivity and dependence, rather than to activity and independence. These people are relatively balanced (they are neither afraid nor neurotic). They rely on others who should look after their material well-being and emotional support. They do not enjoy their work a lot. They like eating and drinking, they enjoy playing table games, they prefer a higher standard of living, they look forward to bank holidays and vacations. These

seniors accept opinions of others willingly. They easily get tired and they like to relax at home. Their resignation and passivity is also reflected in their partnerships because they are rather submissive. Their relationship to other people is a mixture of passive tolerance, opportunism, insecurity and unwillingness to establish new relationships that can disturb their safety and comfort. They evaluate their own qualities and activities relatively well. They are not usually worried, disappointed, or unfriendly. Their feelings of general satisfaction with the world overlap with their tendency towards irreality, excessive optimism and stubbornness. Generally, this strategy of dependence is less favourable. However, it is equally acceptable from a social point of view.

Defending strategy is a less acceptable way of adaptation to old age that is reflected in the postponing of retirement and focusing on different activities. This attitude to old age is also relatively frequent. These people can be described as overly controlled, conventional and excessively active people. They are afraid of possible dependence and relative inactivity. Their attitudes to old age are usually pessimistic. They are aware of some of the advantages of being old, but they envy young people, even though they have been satisfied with their lives and achieved success. They deny their unfriendly and angry behaviour to their relatives and friends. These seniors had an adequate professional career and they were well adapted to work. They actively participated in social organisations and they were prepared for possible financial problems at old age. They worked hard, but they seemed to have other (defending) reasons for it. These people were not satisfied and really interested in their work. They were independent, they usually refused the help of others just to prove that they do not rely on them. They accepted old age only if they were forced to do it in specific situations. Until that time they ignored old age and its ending - death. They try to overcome them with their hard work and activity.

Strategy of hostility can be seen in their unfriendly and angry attitude to others. These people tend to blame other people for their own failures. They are often aggressive and suspicious. They often complain and compare themselves to others. They are used to behave according to their convictions and they do not change their opinions and evaluations easily. They have unreal images about themselves and the world. This attitude supports their isolation and wish to live in seclusion. They deny ageing because they think that old age is a lamentable decay of physical and mental qualities, finishing in death. Their defending reaction to these pessimistic perspectives for the future can be reflected in their hard work. These seniors tend to postpone their leaving from work as long as possible. They lack the ability to adapt to old age in a constructive way. They refuse ideas of relax and dependence on others. They quickly find manifold excuses or reasons to apologise their unsuitable and unreal behaviour. As in the defending strategy, these seniors also try to overcome the influence of ageing by means of maintaining their activity. They refuse to relax and they maintain their relatively stable programme of activities. They strictly follow certain rules and disciplines. These seniors react to everything with some hostility, they envy young people and they behave towards them in an unfriendly and hostile way. They do not see any positive aspects of old age. They are unable to accept it and they are afraid of death.

Strategy of self-hatred differs from the previous strategy only in the way how older people react to aggression. In this strategy older people start hating themselves. They look at themselves critically or even dismissively. They do not wish to live their lives once again. These people neglect social contacts and their overwhelming emotions are remorse and self-blaming. When they were younger, they were passive and they lacked initiative. They were not able to deal with money and they were not responsible enough. They only seldom had some hobbies, they were not practical, and they overestimated their skills. They accepted the process of ageing, but they are not able to look at it in the optimistic and constructive way. They were not ambitious and they did not believe that they could influence something or change somebody. They considered themselves to be victims of

the given situations. They are not afraid of death because they perceive it as a merciful rescue from a very unpleasant situation.

We have described five models of adaptation. In fact, there exists a much bigger variability of strategies of accepting one's own old age. The way of coping with these changes is always completely individual (Langmeier & Krejčířová, 1998). In most cases it is not possible to evaluate any style as a better or worse one. Every unique style, if it corresponds with the personality of a person, should be completely accepted by other people. They should also accept every individual way of coping with emotions or dealing with serious events at all ages (Bromley, 1974). Critical episodes in every life period can bring along new attitudes and new ways of adaptation. People overcome these situations in a dramatic way (e.g. if they suddenly lose their job or they get divorced, their health condition is worsened, etc.). These situations represent or symbolise a certain milestone. Similar episodes can be short periods of conflicts, or unsuccessful plans and they result in a significant reorganisation of reasons and activities. They usually leave a scar in the soul. However, they do not have to undermine the emotional stability of people. On the contrary, they can strengthen it (Bromley, 1974).

3 Successful versus unsuccessful ageing

The theory of successful ageing is an expression of conditions of individual and social life. Within them people reach a maximum feeling of satisfaction and happiness and society keeps an adequate balance in the satisfaction for different age groups of its inhabitants (Havighurst, 1961). There arise many questions about the character of these conditions and they have to be answered in order to understand how people can reach this feeling of satisfaction and happiness. There were formed two contradictory theories of successful ageing: *the theory of activity* and *the theory of seclusion*. In the theory of activity, successful ageing is based on maintaining previous activities and attitudes as long as possible. In the theory of seclusion, successful ageing is based on the acceptance of the process of leaving from active life. Most experts in the area of gerontology prefer the theory of activity and they think that people should maintain their activities and attitudes as long as possible. After that they should find some substitution for those activities they have to give up when they retire. They should try to find new social contacts because the old contacts usually get weaker and many of their friends and relatives die (Havighurst, 1961).

Ageing successfully does not touch deeply on the impact of physical health or economic well-being, both of which certainly affect one's psychological state and may not be under one's control (Baltes & Baltes & Pasupathi, 2019). However, it is indispensable so that society provides the material and immaterial basis of successful life for all age categories and population. Only in this way it is possible to fulfil the practical purpose of gerontology that is „adding life to the years“ in the second half of the human life. This concept of “adding life to the years” is based on helping people to enjoy their life and feel satisfied with it (Havighurst, 1961).

Reichstadt et al (2007, in: Ráczová, 2014) supported the theory of successful ageing. They found out that psychological factors are important for most seniors because they want to be flexible and able to adapt to new situations. They also want to have an optimistic and positive overview to understand better what is happening around them. Ageing successfully does not mean that people will not suffer from diseases. On the contrary, people should try to face them and selectively pay their attention only to those things or activities that provoke positive feelings and emotions.

Nowadays, successful ageing is perceived as a multidimensional concept, whose contents are formed by inner satisfaction and happiness (Havighurst, 1961), self-acceptance and autonomy, positive relationships with other people, meaning of life and personal growth (Ryff, 1989), adequate adaptation, satisfaction with life and subjective well-being (Depp et al, 2010), etc. We

have to mention also the Baltes' SOC Model of ageing (Baltes & Baltes & Pasupathi, 2019). According to this model, there are three strategies that lead to successful later life: *Selection* (refers to the choices that people make from all options available to them); *Optimization* (is the process of making use of all opportunities and even creating new ones to fulfil personal goals); *Compensation* (refers to the use of strategies that allow people to continue doing everything that is important for them).

According to Langmeier & Krejčířová (1998), adaptation of older people to changes is slower and every stress or disease make it worse. For this reason, the principles of spiritual hygiene should be aimed at maintaining and strengthening the process of adaptation. Švancara (1997, in: Langmeier & Krejčířová, 1998) mentions several assumptions for optimal adaptation to old age. They are also called as “5 P-principles”: *Perspective* (maintaining orientation to the future at personal and ultra-personal levels); *Promptness* (ability to accept new impulses, to change one's own attitudes and habits); *Prudence* (ability to organise one's own life according to the given possibilities, ability to compensate possible deficits, lack of energy, etc.); *Perception of other people* (acceptance of others, tolerance of different opinions and attitudes); *Pleasure* (ability to maintain the sources of pleasure and satisfaction).

Old people have to adapt themselves not only to changes in their own bodies (involutionary changes, increased susceptibility to diseases), but also to external changes (changes in social status, lifestyle, social environment) (Langmeier & Krejčířová, 1998). Bromley (1974) says that changes connected with ageing bring along significant, but relatively calm adaptations in all aspects of life. A critical period does not have to be the retirement itself, but the period shortly before leaving from work. At this time many people get nervous because they are afraid of all possible consequences and problems of leaving from active working life. However, people experience these consequences at different times and in different ways. For this reason, there is rather a problem of “ageing” than a problem of “being old”.

Leaving from active working life is the cause of serious problems with adaptation for both men and women. These problems include changes in daily working programmes, smaller financial security, changes in social roles and status, smaller responsibility, authority, changes in social and family relationships, weakened physical health condition, etc. These problems force people to accept new personal attitudes and develop new adaptation strategies (Bromley, 1974). The beginning of retirement is an important milestone, but at the same time, it is also a critical period in life. It is a difficult period because people lose their previously achieved social status and their self-confidence decreases. Some people have problems to adapt to this retirement period. Therefore, we can talk about the so called retirement crisis or disease from retirement. Older people try to do what they could not do before because of lack of time. Confusion they felt at the beginning is substituted with the feeling of satisfaction, but then insecurity comes back. In order to prevent the decay in social and economic status, it is necessary to focus on purposeful dealing with these risks. There is a relatively long period between the termination of career and the beginning of retirement. It is important to fill this time with a meaningful activity, a new programme and life perspective (Stojáková & Pavelková, 2019). For this reason, many people consider this time to be a difficult life situation which brings along problems with adaptation. The biggest difficulties can be observed in people who highly evaluate their own work. Outer conditions (amount of the pension and material level) as well as inner conditions (performance of the senior role), the exact idea about the life at retirement age, and positive attitudes represent the most decisive factors for seniors. Retirement is closely related to the attitude people have during their active working life because this can help them to create new life values. Adaptation has a direct impact on the general satisfaction of older people (Balogová, 2016).

In many cases, leaving from active working life can cause critical situation or shock. There is a certain limitation of the

scope of activities and social contacts, the loss of their habitual daily programmes. Seniors have more time to focus on their problems, they often exaggerate their meaning, and this approach can lead to their social isolation. They stop being members of small social groups they belonged to until now. Seniors often do not know what to do with their free time and this can lead to their personal dissatisfaction. A big part of their life was filled with their work, and now, when they are retired, they feel empty and they have a lot of free time. Seniors who created plans for future already during their working activity, are able to adapt to this new situation more quickly. For this reason, the ideal process of getting retired should lead to the preparation for gradual leaving from active working life and to the creation of a harmonogram of gradual shortening of time at work (Homola & Petřková, in: Balogová, 2016).

Personal adaptation is low if people are not able to overcome problems and obstacles, solve conflicts or they do not achieve satisfactory results in socially acceptable ways of behaviour. Bad adaptation is reflected in unfriendly attitudes, feelings of unhappiness, fear from people, dissatisfaction, panic, addictions, feeling of being guilty, low self-confidence, apathy, retreating or uselessness. These symptoms are almost identical throughout adulthood, but they get stronger with the growing age. This can be observed mainly in women. Badly adapted older people are physically and psychologically tired, they are afraid, disappointed or apathetic (Bromley, 1974). Ráczová & Marhevska (2013) examined the gender differences in attitudes to the process of ageing. Men have a more positive attitude to ageing when compared to women. One reason why women have more difficulties in accepting the irreversible changes of ageing can be the social preference of the youth. These stereotypes influence the generally valid opinions that women should always be attractive and good-looking.

Good adaptation is accompanied with the feelings of happiness, security, satisfaction, sociability, self-confidence, creative activity, and rejection of bad emotions. Well adapted older people are emotionally stable and they are able to accept new situations better. Successful adaptation is connected with an adequate lifestyle, financial and emotional security, good physical condition, regular and frequent social contacts, useful activity and personal hobbies. Successfully adapted people are able to get involved in manifold activities, they can follow their aims, they are active and they face unfavourable situations much more easily. They evaluate themselves positively and they usually feel satisfied and happy. Well adapted people are in good physical and mental condition. They have high moral principles, they rely on their social contacts, they feel relaxed and satisfied with their lives. These characteristic features are based on the feeling of inner satisfaction. This feeling is a more reliable indicator of adaptation than the ability of fulfilling social tasks. Some people feel happy being in their house with a garden, far from everyday noise and stress. They meet mainly with their relatives and friends. Other people feel happy in a house with many neighbours. For this reason, social relationships and inner satisfaction are more reliable indicators of personal adaptation to old age than the ability to work or material conditions. Despite their personal differences, people who get older in the same community, usually have similar ways of adaptation and they evaluate each other according to their generally accepted criteria (Bromley, 1974). According to Hamilton (1999, in: Stojáková & Pavelková, 2019), adaptation to old age could be better if older people had a possibility to participate in voluntary activities or in a working process. They would have a higher income, they would feel more stable, guided and useful. Bromley (1974) says that good adaptation of individuals depends also on the good personal adaptation of other people they meet with. For example, bad adaptation of one person can influence the adaptation of others. Vicious circles of obstructions, bad mood, anger, injustice can arise from matrimonial and family conflicts, misunderstandings at the workplace, etc.

It is evident that optimal adaptation requires many changes in behaviour and reactions to incessantly changing situations. Older people can get ill, but they are able to adapt themselves to their

surroundings in an adequate way. Basic personal features such as optimism can help older people to recover from diseases, whereas other people who tend to feel depressed or they are passive, can become hypochondriac (Bromley, 1974. Sabolová Fabianová & Žiaková 2019) examined how people behave in stressful situations full of changes in the period of ageing (physical changes, changes in health condition, psychological changes, etc.). They found out that the most frequent strategy in coping with changes during the process of ageing is the acceptance of these changes. This strategy is followed by a significant use of spirituality and religiosity. These results can be influenced by general perceiving of old age. If older people do not perceive changes in ageing as a stressful situation, they try to maintain their positive overview. According to Ráczová & Marhevska (2013), self-regulation as another psychological aspect plays an important role in the preparation for ageing and old age. They support the idea that seniors with a higher level of self-control and self-care have a more positive approach to ageing when compared to seniors with a lower level of these psychological features. The importance of self-regulation can be proved in the application of different mechanisms of self-control in the process of adaptation to changes connected with ageing, but also to changes in the ability to modify one's own "I" in order to achieve a higher concordance with their surroundings. Ráczová & Marhevska (2013) mention that proactive attitude, adequate self-care and self-control are also important in the effective preparation for ageing. This strategy has an impact on lifelong orientation and successful ageing. Such a preparation for ageing is crucial for the activation at old age.

4 Instead of conclusion

As aforementioned, older people have a wide range of physical and psychological problems that can have a direct impact on their adaptation. They can be related to the general psychological and physical conditions of seniors, their health and their current life situation. Andragogues cooperating with other specialists (psychologists, doctors, etc.) should identify these obstacles in the optimal adaptation to ageing and they should try to eliminate them. According to Gracová (2014, in: Veteška 2017), professionals should help older people to maintain their physical and psychological conditions mainly by means of suitable educational activities and activation programmes. We think that education can be an effective tool at active old age. Educational programmes should meet all requirements and expectations of older adults and seniors. At the same time, their structure should correspond with the basic principles of education and respect the personalities of seniors and their specific educational needs. Andragogues should be facilitators who perceive and try to fulfil educational needs of older adults and seniors (Határ, 2014, Hupková & Zimermanová, 2013, Müller de Moraes & Jedličková, 2015, Müller de Moraes & Rapsová 2017). Despite the fact that more attention is paid to the education in order to achieve successful ageing, we think that there are still many opportunities for further knowledge from the point of view of geragogy and gerontopsychology. Within the project VEGA no. 1/0001/18 called *Preparation for ageing and old age - possibilities of andragogical intervention*, our aim is to propose an educational programme of successful ageing that would apply strategies of coping with one's own old age, as well as fulfil current needs of older adults and seniors.

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