

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VIEWS AND UNDERSTANDING TOWARDS AGEING AND OLDER ADULTS

^aTIMEA ŠEBEN ZAŤKOVÁ, ^bMARIÁN AMBROZY,
^cMIROSLAVA TOKOVSKÁ, ^dJANA SOLCOVÁ

^aUniversity of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Námestie J. Herdu 2, 917 01, Trnava, Slovakia.

^bInternational School of Management Slovakia in Prešov, Duchnovičovo Námestie 1, Prešov, 080 01, Slovakia.

^cKristiania University College, School of Health Sciences, Prinsens gate 7-9, 0152 Oslo, Norway.

^dMatej Bel University, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Education, 974 11 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

email: ^atimea.seben.zatkova@ucm.sk, ^bambrozy@ismpo.sk, ^cmiroslava.tokovska@kristiania.no, ^djana.solcova@umb.sk

This research originated as a partial outcome of a research project BIN SGS02_2021_002: University Enhancing the Smart Active Ageing (UESAA), supported by Norway through the Norway Grants. Information about the project is available at: <https://ff.ucm.sk/sk/eea-grants/> and within the project KEGA 004UCM-4/2022 Podpora zdravia a pohody študentov prostredníctvom inkluzívnej edukácie na terciárnom stupni ("Promoting the health and well-being of students through inclusive education at the tertiary level").

Abstract: Ageing could be perceived as a dimension encompassing potentially novel roles with favourable and unfavourable connotations. This study explores the views and knowledge of the ageing process and the older generation from university students' perspectives. 60 students enrolled in universities in Slovakia participated in asynchronous email interviews. The data analysis employed a thematic content analysis to interpret the study's outcomes. The results suggest that the viewpoints of university students play a pivotal role in shaping their strategies towards embracing healthy and active ageing in the light of the moral development theory. Higher education institutions should prioritise the positive development of students' attitudes to ageing and the ageing population by fostering the holistic development of their personality.

Keywords: ageing, older adults, university students, view, thematic-content analysis

1 Introduction

Increasing life expectancy has raised concerns about how societies can accommodate ageing populations while promoting healthy and active lifestyles. In recent years, the concept of smart, active ageing has gained interest as a potential solution (Menezes & Rocha, 2021). Active and healthy ageing and living in smart environments refers to creating the environments and opportunities that enable people to feel valued in their existence and actions throughout their lives. Also using technology and innovation to help older adults live independently while promoting physical and mental well-being (WHO, 2020). The ageing index has been significantly increasing in Slovakia in the last decade. The turning point was in 2018 when the number and proportion of older adults exceeded the number and proportion of children for the first time in history. Then, there were 102 people aged 65 and over for every 100 children. The latest national population forecast points to a continuing increase in the ageing index and by 2060 there will be up to 220 people aged 65 and over per 100 children under the age of 15. Current research indicates that the most significant demographic trend will be fully reflected at regional level (Bleha et al. 2018); (Repková, 2020).

Research findings indicate that students generally hold favourable attitudes towards the elderly, albeit with a limited degree of positivity (Sanvicen-Torné et al., 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of a simulated older adults' programme has proven beneficial in enabling nursing students to enhance their comprehension of the physical vulnerabilities and living conditions of the elderly, thereby expanding their perspectives on elderly care (Kocak et al., 2021). In addition, comparisons have been made regarding the negative stereotypes associated with older individuals among young and older adult university students, revealing the prevalence of such stereotypes within both demographics (Hyunjung et al., 2020). Additionally, an examination focusing on the descriptions provided by students of older adults and grandparents demonstrated that descriptors for grandparents tended to be more positive, emphasising

personality traits. This underscores the diversity in perceptions of older individuals and highlights the significance of research in the field of gerontology (Fernandez et al. 2018). Also, Guest et al. (2019) delineated the pervasiveness of gerontophobia and ageism within culture and consciousness, demonstrating their intimate connection with the fear of one's future and discrimination against older adults. How young people perceive the ageing process will inevitably shape their treatment of older adults. This perspective underscores the significance of engaging with young people to facilitate discourse on their perceptions of ageing and the ageing process, as well as their attitudes towards older adults.

Universities should guide their students to develop positive views and understanding towards ageing as well as to promote the holistic development of their personalities. Related to this is the concept of active ageing. Active ageing and the link between self-activation and social support are suitable tools for eliminating social loneliness (Balogová et al. 2018). Before the actual education of older adults, emphasis should also be placed on the aforementioned development of a positive approach to active ageing, as university students are also older adults of the future. The all-round development of one's personality in the future intelligentsia creates the prerequisites for involvement in different areas of life. As long as an individual's creative participation in social events lasts well into adulthood, it may be consistent with social usefulness as well as with the eventual possibility of participating in creative work activities. A positive start to this development can already take place during university studies. There are insufficient studies on how university students in Slovakia perceive general understanding towards the older population and whether there is an association with their own ageing process. This study aims to explore the views and knowledge of the ageing process and the older generation from the university students' perspectives.

The main research question was: *How do Slovak university students view and understand the ageing process and older adults?* In addition, three research sub-questions were employed: "What is the view of Slovak students about ageing?"; "What are Slovak university students doing to implement their active ageing and to attain old age?" and "What are the students' views and ideas on desirable types of active ageing support tools?"

2 The theoretical framework

The field of age differentiation and human ageing has been reflected by several relevant theories. One particularly interesting and frequently used theory is Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which postulates that moral development occurs in parallel with cognitive development. As Babinčák (2012, p. 6) notes, Kohlberg's articulation of stages of moral development describes how the way we think about moral issues changes as a function of the development of cognitive structures. Remisova (1996, p. 43) asserts that Kohlberg's theory of moral development can be understood as a progression from an egocentric to a social norms-accepting and adopting level, and finally to a level of critical reassessment and evaluation of social norms based on general moral principles (Gursky 2021). Kohlberg distinguishes between three levels of moral reasoning: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Furthermore, these stages are subdivided into two sub-stages.

The present study focuses on the post-conventional levels of adulthood. Kohlberg confirms that less than 15% of individuals attain this third level, which consists of the fifth and sixth stages. The fifth stage is oriented towards the social contract. At this stage, individuals begin to reflect on existing legal norms. This implies that they can conceptualise natural law. Kohlberg (1981) is aware that legal acts of positive law may not always follow natural law, that is to say, they may not be correct. The second sub-stage of the third stage represents the pinnacle of this

process and this is the acquisition of a belief in universal ethics. A minimal number of individuals reach this stage, which signifies the actual acquisition of one's views regarding universal ethical rules. This is the stage at which individuals develop their own ethical beliefs.

The younger generation, as university students, will have to master the ethical rules as the basis of their opinions and attitudes towards other people. These opinions should be led by the universal ethical principles regarding the above-mentioned demographic challenges. There are different models of identity crisis, as well as reflections on different stages of human life, including later stages. In this sense, we can point out that the views and understanding of university students as forming intelligence can also prejudice their future strategies in terms of active and positive ageing.

3 Methods and Materials

The study conducted an exploratory qualitative design to capture the view of ageing and older adults from university students ($n = 60$) from five study programmes and two public universities who had participated in this study. The online interview is described by O'Connor & Magde (2017), as an online research method conducted via computer-mediated communication (CMC), which may encompass various forms of digital communication, including instant messaging, email, or video.

The asynchronous email interviews (known as online survey interviews, qualitative surveys, or internet-based interviewing) allow the interviewee to reflect before answering, which may be advantageous in interviews where sensitive topics are addressed (Braun et al. 2021); (Dahlin, 2021); (Oates et al., 2022). Furthermore, the text is already transcribed, which requires the interviewer to invest time and effort into the answers and follow-up questions. This ensures that the participant feels valued (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). The topic of ageing may not be considered a sensitive one, but given that the researchers were interested in university students' views on general views on ageing as well as their perceptions of ageing, they chose this method of data collection with the assumption that it would ensure free expression of views and sharing of ideas.

3.1 Setting and Sample

This study was conducted at two public universities in Slovakia, one in western and the other in central Slovakia. Both universities collaborated on the project 'University Enhancing Smart Active Ageing' funded by EEA and Norway Grants BIG SGS02_2021_002: in the period from 2022 to 2024. The present study will utilise the qualitative data collected through the main project and aims to explore the views of university students towards ageing and older adults.

The main study consisted of 136 university students recruited from two Slovak public universities between November 2023 and December 2023. University students interested in participating ($n = 60$) received written information about the study. Participants had to meet the following main criteria: (1) undergraduate and graduate students; (2) age range: 18-35; (4) fluency in Slovak language; (5) voluntary participation.

All participants were recruited from different geographical areas. The mean age of the participants was 30. The sample consisted of university students from four study programmes (Psychology, Education, Social Work, Foreign language studies) and Humanities (not further specified) - (see Table 4).

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected during the period January 2024 to April 2024. The lead author (TSZ) commissioned a third author (MT) to create a secure digital space to ensure data collection into the Nettskjema system. Nettskjema is a secure digital tool and space developed and operated by the University Information

Center, Norway. This ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The interview document had a study code and was kept in a separate location from the participant identification information. Only one of the researchers (MT) had access to both these documents. This researcher assigned security codes to computer records and then encrypted identifiable data. Following the receipt of the email, the data were encrypted, anonymised, and shared in a secure virtual space with other researchers to enable evaluation. An asynchronous email interview was guided by questions such as: How old would you like to live? Who do you think is an old man and woman? Please, describe old age...: What are you doing to maximise your life expectancy?

3.3 Ethical considerations

The study received ethical approval and a research permit from the promoter of the project, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava, Slovakia, with reference number FF-EK-2-2023. The ethical principles were respected in the conducted research. These principles included voluntary participation of all research subjects, informed consent obtained from all participants, anonymity of the responses was secured, confidentiality was safeguarded by removing all identifying information of participants from the study, potential for harm was considered in the study and it was eliminated by the informed consent of the participants.

3.4 Data Analysis

A thematic content analysis (TCA), described by Braun & Clarke (2013), is a suitable form of methodology because it entails the recognition of patterns or themes in textual information and showcases results through the classification of data into themes according to shared characteristics, followed by the measurement of the frequency of each theme to unveil their prevalence and importance.

The initial step of the TCA involved the manual coding and analysis of the data. This approach was selected due to the flexibility, deep engagement, and reduced interpretive bias afforded by manual coding methods conducted by all researchers. Inductive coding was employed to identify all relevant descriptions across all participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participant views on ageing and older adults. Open coding was then used to identify meaning units associated with concepts relevant to our research questions. Subsequently, the researchers TSZ & JS developed sub-themes and themes based on the clustered meaning units. Both researchers engaged with this independently to enhance the dependability and confirmability of the study's findings. In the event of discrepancies, the researchers TSZ & JS consulted with the next researchers MT & MA. The coding scheme was applied systematically to the entire dataset, coding responses across different themes and subthemes. The frequencies of themes and subthemes were tabulated based on the number of times participants used repeated terms that could be clustered under specific themes and subthemes in response to interview questions. The data were then interpreted based on the predominant aspect of each theme and subtheme in the participants' responses, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. The themes were then reviewed against the data, with the analytic process repeated from the beginning without reference to the initial units of meaning, categories, sub-themes, and themes. As the analysis progressed, the researchers refined the meaning units and categories as necessary. Finally, after the process, the researchers separated or consolidated the units, categories, sub-themes, and themes, retaining the participants' words to reflect a realistic ontology. The findings were presented in the tables of frequencies (Tables 1, 2, 3).

Table 1: Thematic frequency -The notion of older age

The notion of older age (60)	Positive or neutral connotations (32)	Age (16)	Over 50 (2); Over 60 (4); Over 65 (2); Over 70 (3); Over 75 (2); Over 80 (2)
		Experienced person (3)	Experiences/knowledge (3)
		A person who thinks of him/herself as old (5)	Who feels him/herself to be old (3); Who thinks he/she is old (2)
		Do not know (4)	Do not know (2); It is relative (2)
		Pension and grandchildren (4)	Retirement (3); Grandchildren (2)
	Negative connotations (28)	Loss of purpose in life (4)	Someone who has lost the sense/purpose of life (4)
		Loss of physical and mental health (15)	A person who has a lot of wrinkles (3)
			Someone who has many diseases (5)
			Someone who can't take care of him/herself/needs help (4)
			Loss of strength (3)
		A person who waits for death (5)	The final stage of life (2); Do not want to live/resigned to live (3)
		Someone who does not create new experiences but lives in the past (4)	Someone who does not want to learn (2); Lives in the past (2)

Table 1 illustrates that the positive or neutral connotations of older age are slightly prevailing over the negative connotations. The majority of university students perceive older age in connection with a certain age or as a loss of physical and mental health.

Table 2: Thematic frequency - Support of one's ageing

Support of one's ageing (60)	Healthy lifestyle (41)	Lifestyle (9); Good sleep (3); Workout (6); Movement (3); Healthy diet (8); Not smoking (3); No alcohol (2); No stress (3); Meditations (2); Healthy relationships (2)
	Just living (8)	Active life (6); Education (2)
	Nothing (11)	Nothing (11)

The frequency of themes (Table 2) connected with the procedures of the students aimed at supporting their own ageing consisted of three categories, namely healthy lifestyle, normal living and no implemented procedures and activities.

Table 3: Thematic frequency - Desired support

Desired support in old age (60)	Family and social environment (11)	Family (6); Not to be alone (2); Pet (3)
	Internet, online communication, online shopping (7)	Online shopping (2); Home delivery (2); Communication (3)
	Good quality care services (8)	Good quality of medical care (3); Doctor (2); Other people's help (3)
	Financial security and assurance (10)	Higher pension (5); Financial help (5)
	Technology and compensatory aids (14)	AI/Smart assistant (4); Household robots (3); Assistive technologies (7)
	Education of elderly (3)	Possibility of education/memory development (3)
	Not to be old (7)	Sanity/ preserved mental abilities (3)
	Don't know (4)	

Table 3 summarises the frequency of identified categories under the theme of desired support in older age. The most frequent

were technology and compensatory aids and the second most frequent was family and social environment.

4 Results

Table 4: Participants' characteristics

Age	N / %
18-20	16 (26.66)
21-23	17 (28.33)
24-26	4 (6.66)
27-30	4 (6.66)
>31	19 (31.66)
Study level	
Undergraduate (Bc.)	50 (83.33)
Graduate (MA.)	10 (16.66)
Study field	
Psychology	22 (36.66)
Education	8 (13.33)
Social work	12 (20.00)
Languages	8 (13.33)
Humanities (not further specified)	10 (16.66)

4.1 University students' view on the ageing process

In terms of outcomes related to ageing, university students view older people as a group of people of a certain age with various health and mental health problems. Few of them see older people more positively as experienced and wise individuals. Concerning the different views on old age and ageing, students also express different expectations about their life expectancy.

Table 5 View of the university students on desired age of life

Desirable age	N	%
60 and less	4	06.67
61-75	8	13.33
76-90	24	40.00
More than 90	8	13.33
Other	16	26.67
Total	60	100

Answers in the category "Other" show the participants' different views on ageing. Some of them have positive attitudes toward ageing, which can be seen in their desire to live as long as possible:

P1: "As long as possible." P5: "If my health would hold out, of course, as high as possible." P18: "As long as I will be allowed." P27: "Forever." P28: "As God gives." P38: "80 would be nice, but at least in retirement if I died I wouldn't complain."

P12: "Tough question, mainly to keep me independent, so probably max 89." P16: "To such an extent that I am not intellectually, mentally and physically dependent on others." P17: "I want to live as long as my brain will serve me." P20: "Until a dignified age." P22: "100 (but only with mental well-being)." P25: "An age at which I would be physically and mentally independent." P30: "Mainly to be independent, not reliant on others."

The extremely negative views on older age were also present among university students as follows:

P34: "Depends on where the world is going. If it goes on at this rate and direction, I won't want to live." P42: "Not so much." P48: "I wish I hadn't been born in the first place, but since I'm here I would be happy with 30."

The notion of older age by the respondents

Older age is seen in various connotations by the students.

4.1.1 Negative connotations of ageing comprised of the following answers:

A person who waits for death; Loss of purpose in life; Aspect of age; A person who does not create new experiences but lives in the past; Someone who complains about everything; Loss of physical and mental health.

4.1.2 Positive or neutral connotations of ageing were:

Person with experience; Who has grandchildren; Pension; A person who thinks of himself as old; Does not know.

Negative, positive and neutral connotations were categorised according to the participants' answers to the question: Who do you think is an old person? Try to define old age.

Answers describing old age by university students were heterogeneous. As mentioned, the answers varied from negative to positive connotations. The variety of views on old age with some of the participants' citations are as follows:

1. A person who waits for death (e.g. P2: "Old age is the end of a person's life stage." P8: "Someone who is waiting to die because most of those he loved are already dead.")
2. Loss of purpose in life (e.g. P10: "a person who has no desire to live!" P32: "an old person who has resigned him/herself to life")
3. Specific age as the criterion of old age (e.g. P13: "An old person, in my opinion, is a person of retirement age, roughly over 65." P21: "My idea of an old person is someone who is over 55. Old age for me is related to age and not to feelings. That's normal because there's nothing wrong with it. It is perfectly natural. In old age, the body and mind are naturally weaker and don't offer the same possibilities as they did during adolescence and youth. On the other hand, with old age should come greater peace and life satisfaction. I think of old age as the final part of life, when everyone should be able to come to terms with how they have lived." P42: "It is one that has reached a high age. Old age- the final stage of development where a person is at the end of his life, it is the culmination of a person's life stage")
4. One who does not create new experiences but lives in the past (e.g. P25: "A person who has reached a certain age and no longer creates new experiences but would rather live in the past and remember what life was like." P29: "In my opinion, an old person is no longer willing to learn and adapt to new things." P18: "A person who does not work on him/herself, does not develop, is indifferent to him/herself, is not young in spirit.", P3: "An old person is a person who no longer understands "new things", does not know and does not want to change his/her mind about things, and takes what s/he knows as the gospel truth. Old age is that period of life that does not welcome the passing of time.
5. Loss of physical and mental health (e.g. P35: "Someone who can't walk, a person who has a lot of wrinkles, and is hard of hearing." P45: "A person who, by virtue of his or her biological age, has various forms of limitations and difficulties.")
6. A person who thinks of him/herself as old (e.g. P26: "Old age is subjective. I think that an old person is one who says or feels that s/he is old." P34: "Someone who feels old." P50: "It depends on who is feeling how sometimes even an older person can feel young and not realise they are already old.")
7. People who have grandchildren (e.g. P8: "A person who has grandchildren, or is of an age where they may already have grandchildren.")
8. Pension (e.g. P47: "Old age begins with retirement." P49: "For me, a person of retirement age." P60: "I define old

age partly by appearance, but mainly by a person who is already retired and not working.")

9. Person with experience (e.g. P37: "A person with a certain amount of practice, experience and accomplishments in life." P56: "A person who remembers a lot, and is entitled to rest, the elderly are supposedly protected persons, they deserve respect")
10. Do not know (e.g. P9: "I can't define it exactly." P59: "I don't know, it is relative")

4.2 Support of one's ageing

Table 6 Participants' activities to support their own ageing

Category	N / %	Examples of chosen answers
Healthy lifestyle	41 / 68.33	P3: I exercise, eat healthily, try to think positively P12: I try to eat a balanced diet, get enough good quality sleep, exercise, educate myself, and do leisure activities to relieve stress (psychohygiene). Healthy diet, exercise, psychohygiene, faith in God
Just living	8 / 13.33	I try to live an active life I'm living I try to live so that I and my surroundings are satisfied
Nothing	11 / 18.33	I don't want to live to an advanced age not much of anything, I'm glad I'm living the current age nothing
Total	60 / 100	

In connection to surveying the desirable help and support in participants' older age, students would prefer various areas:

4.2.1 Family and social environment (e.g. P2: "I wouldn't want to be alone in the first place. I would like to be surrounded by friends and, most importantly, to have functioning medical and nursing care in Slovakia." P18: "Minimum technology. I would rather have a helper animal like a dog." P19: "Family help.");

4.2.2 Good quality care services (e.g. P10: "Pretty young nanny." P21: "Someone to take care of me at home." P30: "Doctor visiting me at home.");

4.2.3 Technology and compensatory aids (e.g. P33: "Technology to help me overcome health problems." P34: "A robot that will do things for me or with me that I won't be able to do on my own.");

4.2.4 Internet, online communication, online shopping (e.g. P1: "Online shopping; making doctor's appointments, dealing with paperwork for the authorities, it would be nice to have more things electronically to avoid endless waiting in queues." P42: "Technologies that would allow me to communicate with my loved ones if I no longer have the strength to visit them or someone to talk to so I don't feel alone (but we already have such apps.");

4.2.5 Education of elderly (e.g. P15: "So that the elderly are taught the necessary things and not that some procedure is implemented e.g. in the health service to facilitate (online appointment booking), while some people don't even have the internet"; P55: "To make them more aware of internet safety and scammers". P60: "I would still welcome opportunities to develop and train my brain.");

4.2.6 Financial security and assurance (e.g. P17: "To have a good pension". P35: "It would be quite sufficient for me if the state guaranteed me the provision of a quality social service of my choice. And that the provision of this quality social service should be financially affordable for me, i.e. that my family should not have to contribute financially").

There was also a group of respondents who shared a negative opinion of older age in the form of statements such as P8: "Don't get old!". The other student wrote P9: "Euthanasia!". P57: "I can't imagine living with limited health." Ten students could not state any own proposals about older age and they pointed out; P20: "I never thought about it". P6: "Nothing". or P39: "I can't comment on that".

5 Discussion

Several recommendations and challenges focused on public policies aiming at the target group of older people have been formed by international institutions recently. All are based on principles of respect for human dignity, the development of prosperity and civil liberties (Chancellery of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Department: Parliamentary Institute, 2020). The issue is covered in particular by the following documents: UN Principles for Older Adults (addressing the principles of independence, participation in society, care, self-realisation and dignity); Recommendations on Ageing and Disability in the 21st Century by the Council of European Committee: Sustainable Frameworks for Higher Quality life in an inclusive society; the European Social Charter (describes measures to promote full citizenship and an active social position, the promotion of independent living in a preferred environment); European Charter of the Rights and Responsibilities of Older People Dependent on Long-Term Care and Assistance (describes measures to ensure the right to dignity, well-being, freedom and security, the right to self-determination, care, information and counselling, communication and social participation) and others. These documents adopted on an international level are focused on the well-being of the elderly as part of the national documents about the elderly, long-term institutional care for the elderly and lifelong learning for the elderly. The reasons for the interest of this study in issues of active ageing are specifically connected to the Slovak context, for example, the ageing of Slovak populations brings changes in the age structure of people and a growing population in the group above 65 years of age. In the last century, demographic changes have been recorded at the level of population ageing resulting from the decline in mortality and fertility rates, and the increase in average life expectancy. Another important demographic feature is the growth of the group of "very old people" (aged 80+) and a decrease in the number of young people, thus the so-called double ageing (Pereira et al., 2023). Double ageing will have immense economic, social and medical importance.

The same situation is also in Slovakia, the changes in the demographic structure by economic age groups point to an ageing population. This trend has continued since 2011 when the working-age population has tended to decline and the share of the population of post-working age has increased (The Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 2023). Due to the aforementioned situation, it is important to prepare the younger generation for their own ageing and also to develop their understanding of some aspects connected with advancing age. Positive or neutral perceptions of old age only slightly prevail among the students. As proved by the investigation, not all the students positively perceive older age, their views on the elderly population differ and also their opinions on the most useful tools and types of support for the elderly and active ageing are varied. Even some of the students (lower numbers) do not implement any activities to support their own healthy ageing and do not think about their future, or they do not want to live to an advanced age. On the other hand, it is proved by literature (Edström, 2018); (Chang et al., 2020); (Marques et al., 2020); (Bratt et al., 2023); (Hyunjung, 2020); (Guest, 2021) that as people age, older adults are confronted with a multitude of challenges, including stigmatisation and negative attitudes that are prevalent in society.

The stigmatisation of older adults can manifest itself at both a structural (i.e., institutions; healthcare) and individual level, becoming a public health issue with deleterious effects on the health and well-being of older adults. Ageism, or negative

attitudes towards older adults, including those held by younger generations and also by older adults themselves, is shaped by prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Attitudes and understanding towards the older generation are shaped by the unique process of the moral development of each individual. Attitudes can be defined as thoughts or beliefs with an evaluative component (Bohner, 2011). How one perceives older adults can differ by age, personal experience and education. Attitudes towards one's personal support of ageing have been associated with one's lifestyle, health and well-being, and self-compassion and compassion to others. Research reveals that individuals who have a positive view of ageing, both on their own and in general, perceive less discriminatory behaviours in others (Voss et al, 2016); (Giasson et al., 2017). This is following the Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981). The presumption is, that when students attain the stage of ethics of self-chosen, universal ethical principles, less prejudice, negative attitudes and stereotypes occur in their views and opinions towards the elderly. At this final stage, the morally good action is based on personally held principles that apply both to the person's immediate life as well as to the larger community and society. The universal principles may include a belief in democratic due process (Stage 5), but also other principles, such as a belief in the dignity of all human life or the sanctity of the natural environment. At Stage 6, the individual's beliefs are guided by universal principles, which may occasionally lead to disagreement with customary practices (Stage 4) or even with legal norms (Stage 5).

The dissemination of universal principles at university level should facilitate the development of more positive attitudes towards ageing and the older generation, thereby reducing the prevalence of ageist views. It is the responsibility of universities to educate young people about the importance of fostering a society that is more welcoming of older generations.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The results suggest that the viewpoints of university students play a pivotal role in shaping their strategies towards embracing healthy and active ageing in the light of the moral development theory. Higher education institutions should prioritise the positive development of students' attitudes related to ageing and the ageing population by fostering the holistic development of their personality.

It is essential to provide university students with adequate education and training in the field of active ageing and provide them with sufficient information about the elderly population. Due to the above, it is essential to facilitate communication between the two groups through the development of the understanding of the ageing specifics. Furthermore, the younger generation's knowledge of the various aspects of ageing and older age can provide the basis for their own healthy active ageing processes.

Our findings indicate that university students require a deeper understanding of physical weakness, the potential for successful ageing, and the knowledge required for elderly people to age in peace. This can be achieved by integrating active-based learning with the use of simulation, such as the GERT age simulation suit (Moll, 2019). It can be argued that academic training may positively influence the image of older persons constructively and beneficially. Furthermore, the incorporation of gerontological content into the social sciences curriculum could facilitate the resolution of existing barriers. To mitigate the negative perceptions of ageing and older adults, university education should emphasise the importance of healthy habits and a positive perception of ageing. Furthermore, lifelong learning initiatives at universities can benefit older individuals. The incorporation of themes related to the elderly in universities can facilitate intergenerational learning.

Literature:

1. BABINČÁK, P.: 2012. Meranie morálneho usudzovania – prehľad metodík. Meranie morálneho usudzovania. Zborník príspevkov z konferencie. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita, pp. 5-19. ISBN 978-80-555-0508-4.
2. BALOGOVÁ, B. LOVASOVÁ, S. LUKÁCOVÁ, V.: 2018. Social loneliness and social support in the elderly. *Ad Alta – Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 8 (2), pp. 158-160. ISSN 1804-7890.
3. BLEHA, B.; ŠPROCHA, B.; VAŇO, B.: 2018. Forecast of the population of Slovakia until 2060. Bratislava: Infostat. Demographic Research Centre. Available: http://www.infostat.sk/vdc/pdf/Prognoza_SR_2060_DEF.pdf.
4. BOHNER, G.; DICKEL, N.: 2011. Attitudes and Attitude Change. *Annual Review of Psychology* 62 (1), pp. 391-417. ISSN 066-4308, doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.121208.131609.
5. BRATT, A. S., FAGERSTRÖM, C.: 2023. Perceptions of General Attitudes towards Older Adults in Society: Is There a Link between Perceived Life Satisfaction, Self-Compassion, and Health-Related Quality of Life?. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20 (4), ISSN 1660-4601. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20043011.
6. BRAUN, V.; CLARKE, V.; BOULTON, E.; DAVEY, L.; MCEVOY, CH.: 2021. The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 24 (6), pp. 641-654, ISSN 1364-5579. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550
7. DAHLIN, E.: 2021. Email interviews: A guide to research design and implementation. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, pp. 1-10. ISSN 1609-4609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211025453>
8. EDSTRÖM, M.: 2018. Visibility patterns of gendered ageism in the media buzz: A study of the representation of gender and age over three decades. *Feminist Media Studies* 18 (1), pp. 77-93. ISSN 1468-0777.
9. GIASSON, H. L.; QUEEN, T. L.; LARKINA, M.; SMITH, J.: 2017. Age Group Differences in Perceived Age Discrimination: Associations With Self-Perceptions of Aging. *Gerontologist* 57 (Suppl. 2) pp. 160-168. ISSN 0016-8013. doi: 10.1093/geront/gnx070.
10. GUEST, M. A.; NIKZAD-TERHUNE, K.; KRUGER, T. M.; ROWLES, G. D.: 2021. Exploring college students' attitudes toward older adults: A description of methods used by the gerontological literacy network. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 42 (4) pp. 578-588. ISSN 0270-1960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02701960.2019.1638257>
11. GURSKY, P.: 2021. On the safety and danger of viral information from the perspective of the epistemological subject. *Ethics & Bioethics* 11 (3-4), pp. 126-141. ISSN 2453-7829.
12. HYUNJUNG, K.; HEE-JEONG, K.; EUN, J. Y.: 2020. Nursing University Students' Experiences in Simulated and Structured Elderly Life - Focused on Content Analysis Techniques. *Journal of The Korean Chemical Society* 11 (5), pp. 107-115. ISSN 1017-2548. doi: 10.15207/JKCS.2020.11.5.107
13. CHANG, E. S.; KANNOTH S.; LEVY, S.; WANG, S. Y.; LEE, J. E.; LEVY, B. R.: 2020. Global reach of ageism on older persons' health: A systematic review. *PLoS ONE* 15 (1), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220857>
14. Kancelária Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky. Odbor Parlamentný inštitút.: 2020. Porovnávací analýza: Porovnanie právnej úpravy ochrany seniorov v krajinách EÚ. <https://www.nr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=506742>
15. KOCAK, O.; AYDIN, S.; TOMAC, N. et al.: 2021. College Students' Attitudes Toward the Elderly: an Exploratory Study in Turkey. *Ageing International* 46 (4), pp. 383-394, ISSN 0163-5158, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-020-09393-8>
16. KOHLBERG, L.: 1981. *The Philosophy of Moral Development Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
17. MARQUES, S.; MARIANO, J.; MENDONÇA, J.; DE TAVERNIER W.; HESS, M.; NAEGELE, L.; PEIXEIRO, F.; MARTINS, D.: 2020. Determinants of Ageism against Older Adults: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (7). ISSN 1660-4601. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17072560.
18. MENEZES, P.; ROCHA, R. P.: 2021. Promotion of active ageing through interactive artificial agents in a smart environment. *SN Applied Sciences* 3, 583. ISBN 2523-3963, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42452-021-04567-8>
19. MOLL, W.: 2019. GERonTologic simulator GERT. Retrieved from <http://www.age-simulation-suit.com/>
20. OATES, M.; CRICHTON, K.; CRANOR, L.; BUDWIG, S.; WESTON, E. J.; BERNAGOZZI, B. M.; PAGADUAN, J.: 2022. Audio, video, chat, email, or survey: How much does online interview mode matter?. *PLoS ONE* 17 (2), e0263876. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263876>
21. O'CONNOR, H.; MADGE, C.: 2017. Online interviewing. *The SAGE handbook of online research methods*, 2, pp. 416-434. ISBN 9781446241042. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957992>
22. PEREIRA, M. C.; ROSA, M.; SANTOS, M. H.: 2023. The Gender of Retirement in a Double-Ageing Country: Perspectives and Experiences of Retired Women and Men in Portugal. *Behavioral Sciences (Basel)* 13 (9), ISSN 2076-328X. doi: 10.3390/bs13090774.
23. REMIŠOVÁ, A.: 1996. Kohlberg theory of the development of moral judgements. *Filozofia* 51 (7), pp. 439-447, ISSN 0046-385X.
24. REPKOVÁ, K.: 2020. Fulfilment of national priorities for the development of social services in the years 2015-2020. Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, Department of Social Services. 131 p., ISBN 978-83-64838-39-2
25. SANVICEN-TORNÉ, P.; STONČIKAITĚ, I.; SOLDEVILA-BENET, A.; MOLINA-LUQUE, F.: 2022. Reconstructing the Social Image of Older Women and Ageing: The Transformative Power of the Narrative Set in the Local Context. *Land* 11 (7), ISSN 2073-445X. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11071057>
26. SAARIJÄRVI, M.; BRATT, E. L.: 2021. When face-to-face interviews are not possible: tips and tricks for video, telephone, online chat, and email interviews in qualitative research. *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing* 20 (4), pp. 392-396, ISSN 1474-5151, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurjcn/zvab038>
27. Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky. (2023) *The Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 2023*. Bratislava : Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, 2023. ISBN 9788081219085
28. VOSS, P.; WOLFF, J. K.; ROTHERMUND, K.: 2017. Relations between views on ageing and perceived age discrimination: A domain-specific perspective. *European Journal of Ageing* 14 (1), pp. 5-15. doi: 10.1007/s10433-016-0381-4.

Primary Paper Section: A**Secondary Paper Section: AM**