re-BUS

You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUŚ
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

Title: Attitudes towards the elderly among students of pedagogy

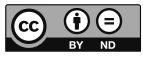
Author: Katarzyna Jas

Citation style: Jas Katarzyna. (2021). Attitudes towards the elderly among students of pedagogy. "Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education" Vol. 10, no 20 (2021), s. 57-70, doi 10.35765/mjse.2021.1020.03

Uznanie autorstwa - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Ta licencja zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu zarówno w celach komercyjnych i niekomercyjnych, pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).

UNIWERSYTET ŚLĄSKI W KATOWICACH
Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Śląskiego
Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education Vol. 10, 2021/2 No. 20
ISSN 2543-7585 e- ISSN 2543-8409
DOI: 10.35765/mjse.2021.1020.03
Submitted: 14.04.2021
Accepted: 18.10.2021



Katarzyna Jas
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8382-1423
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
e-mail: katarzyna.jas@us.edu.pl

Attitudes Towards the Elderly Among Students of Pedagogy

Abstract

The main aim of this study is to consider and present pedagogy students' attitudes towards the elderly. The results presented herein were collected in a pilot project. The survey was conducted among 66 pedagogy students; a questionnaire and the semantic differential method were used as the research tools. The results revealed positive attitudes among the students towards the elderly. However, a conclusion was drawn that pedagogy students should be allowed to take part in activities involving the elderly. Students's awareness of their own attitudes might allow them to understand elderly people's behavior. A proper understanding of the aging process and old age can create a chance for better communication and inter-generational cooperation. It is also an inspiration for understanding their own aging process.

Keywords: ageism, attitudes towards the elderly, the elderly, students, stereotypes

Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education
Vol. 10, 2021/2 No. 20

Introduction

The aging of Polish society is prompting more and more discussions about old age and the elderly. The fact is causing changes in the socioeconomic environment. The discourse and general issues of elderly people – although sometimes separated into a distinct topic – can in fact be found in different disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, medicine, or even economics. The aspects of old age are presented in different contexts, which lead to both positive and negative perceptions of the elderly in society. Attitudes towards late adulthood and the elderly[1] depend on an individual's experiences. The subject of aging and old age is so important that it has been tackled many times in pedagogy. It has been dealt with by many authors, including Zofia Szarota (2011), Anna Leszczyńska-Rejchert (2010), Astrid Tokaj (2008), and Barbara Szatur-Jaworska et al. (2006).

Scientific studies claim that attitudes towards other people are created at the stage of late adolescence. There are plenty of factors which influence the personality of a young person. A person's attitudes, opinions and views are affected by many people who can both create and implement positive and negative values. "The period just before early adulthood is a kind of suspension between adolescence and adulthood, when young people clearly define their own identity by presenting preferences in values, goals, and outlook of their professional activities and interpersonal relationships" (Nierzewska, 2018, p. 57).

The literature on the subject presents the opinion that the elderly often meet stereotypical attitudes in society, negative judgements, or even prejudices from younger generations. Such behavior might cause different limitations in inter-generational relationships.

The issue of students' attitudes towards the elderly has already been discussed in various fields. It can be assumed that because of the growing number of elderly people, there is still a need to deliberate on the topic. It should be done in order to encourage younger generations to

[1] The term late adulthood refers to the period of human aging traditionally called "old age." The lower limit of this developmental period hovers between the age of 55 and 60 and beyond (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2002, pp. 15, 263).

engage in reflection, actions involving the elderly, and inter-generational dialogue so as to increase active participation in social life and improve the quality of the lives of the elderly.

Author's occupation and her social activities closely connected with the elderly became a motivational factor to research the attitudes towards the older generations. Among young people a stereotypical perception of the elderly can often be observed; they may also avoid contact or be unwilling to do volunteer work or practical training at home care centers. Inte rviews with students prompted the author to seek a deeper understanding of opinions about the elderly expressed by students of pedagogy in Cieszyn.

The Research Process

The following results were gathered in the pilot survey that preceded larger-scale research. The goal of analysis was to answer the following questions: What are the students' attitudes towards the elderly? How do the students perceive the elderly? The author's thesis was that the prospective educators would express positive views connected with old age and the elderly. The most common image of the elderly presented by the Cieszyn students considered them to be the source of knowledge and life wisdom. However, only a few students expressed a desire to work with the elderly in the future.

A questionnaire following Krzysztof Rubacha's typology was used as a tool for collecting quantitative data (Rubacha, 2008, p. 132). Due to the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, an electronic version of the questionnaire was prepared (Batorski & Olcoń-Kubicka, 2006, p. 101). The tool was created in webankieta.

The semantic differential approach was also used in the research. This method is "a way of gathering knowledge about structural and functional features and dynamics of social phenomena, the opinions and views of selected societies, and the escalation and development of specified phenomena" (Pilch & Bauman, 2019, p. 80).

Osgood's semantic differential is the most commonly used method to research a descriptive aspect of a stereotype. Apart from power and activity factors, an evaluation factor (Osgood) can be distinguished from scales measuring the meaning of different words. In comparison to other common lists of features (used to research the characteristic features of a subject), semantic differential scales have the advantage of being able to establish the level of a characteristic feature possessed by a research subject (Maciążek & Kurcz, 1992, p. 201).

A semantic differential makes it possible to describe a definition in an emotional aspect. The researcher is thereby able to establish the emotional attitude of a person or a group of people to an aspect they are researching (Chimicz, 2017, p. 153). A semantic differential allows one to measure the "connotative meaning of definitions in emotional attitude towards a referent" (Śleszyński & Wiśniewski, 1997, p. 200). A differential may consist of 10 to 12 scales and the results may be presented as numerical or percentage values.

All positive characteristics have to be on one end of the scale and all negative characteristics on the other. In order to reduce the risk of stereotypical assessment, some of the scales may be presented in reverse, which means that the end-points of the scales are reversed. However, this has to be taken into account when processing the results (Divilová, 2016, p. 1859). When considering the construction of a tool, Earl Babbie stresses that one should "avoid burdens in patterns of answers[;] closely connected definitions should not be written on the same side" (Babbie, 2006, p. 193).

The semantic differential used in this research was based on such guidelines. A list of features describing the elderly was created with the descriptions with similar emotional values written on different sides. The scale between opposing definitions was 10 points. The following descriptive categories for the 10-point continuum were adopted: points closer to the definition meant a stronger escalation of the emotional relation to it, while points 5–6 meant indifference, which may have been due to a lack of knowledge of the topic.

The research was conducted in November and December 2020. A total of 66 full-time and part-time, first-cycle studies (50.00%) and second-cycle

studies (45.45%) students of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn at Silesian University in Katowice were included in the study. The majority (72.73%) of the research sample was in the second year of university, 18.19% in the third year, and 6.06% in the fourth year; the remainder of the students did not record the year of their studies. Female respondents made up 90.91% of the sample. Most of the respondents were aged 20–25 years, while people between 29 and 44 years of age represented 9.09% of respondents. About half (51.52%) of the students questioned lived in towns or cities, while the remaining 48.48% of them came from rural areas.

Attitudes and Stereotypes Towards the Elderly: Theoretical Considerations

Since time began, old age has been perceived ambiguously. On the one hand, experience and life wisdom were admired; on the other hand, people were afraid of the natural physical problems connected with aging. The negative attitudes of the younger generation towards the older one are a basis of inter-generational conflict.

"A lot of studies show that attitudes towards others are mainly developed at the period of late adolescence. Moreover, they are influenced by certain parents' attitudes, peer groups, at school and work environment" (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p. 188).

Young people form and express their own opinions and judgements on the basis of what they read and hear. This contributes to positive or negative perceptions being formed of people from other groups, including older people. It can be assumed that students of pedagogy – future teachers and carers who will work with children in the future – have a great responsibility in terms of shaping attitudes towards older people. The views they express in the presence of children should be balanced, without resorting to extreme statements.

Wojciszke (2011) stated that an attitude is a "relatively stable tendency towards a positive or negative opinion on the subject of the attitude"

(p. 200). Attitudes consist of three coherent elements: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. "The majority of studies explain 'an attitude' as a definition that occurs mainly in social psychology, meaning a judgement of the subject of the attitude in cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects" (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p. 188).

The cognitive element is connected with the knowledge a person has about the subject and towards whom the attitude is presented. "It can consist of beliefs, doubts, or assumptions connected with the subject of the attitude. It can also include information about the subject of the attitude which allows them to distinguish how wide and how reliable the knowledge is" (Tuczyński & Walat, 2019, p. 211). This knowledge is often based on stereotypes and prejudices derived from the home, school, or peers. Stereotypes might be connected with appearance, sex, religion, profession, place of residence, place of birth, nationality, or age. "The perception of other social groups – including ethnic groups – as the literature on the subject shows, might be theoretically connected with the definitions of attitudes, prejudices, or stereotypes" (Bokszański, 1993, p. 40).

The old age stereotype that functions in society reflects the situation of people in late adulthood. It can be positive or negative. The positive stereotype presents an old person as a person who is wise, "understanding, oriented towards the family and their needs, although focused on the past" (Ździebło, 2008, pp. 65–66). When the elderly are perceived as useless and ill people, this is the negative stereotype. Shown in such a way, old age causes fear and unwillingness, especially among young people.

The emotional element, also known as affective, can be presented in terms of positive or negative emotions. This component also includes judgements which are presented by such expressions as good or bad (Marody, 1976). The phenomenon called ageism is a basic element of the emotional cognitive component.

Ageism can be seen as a process of systematically stereotyping and discriminating against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, and old-fashioned in morality and skills. Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people

as different from themselves; they therefore subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings" (Cohen, 2001, p. 576).

The behavior of a person towards the subject of their attitude can be observed thanks to its behavioral component (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p.188). "It is described by positive or negative actions, which include observed actions aimed at a subject of the attitude: verbal, mimic, pantomimic, and vocal reactions" (Fidelus, 2012, p. 97).

Students' Attitudes in comparison with the Research Conducted

For 79% of the respondents, the onset of old age begins at 70 years, while 20% of them indicated that 65 represents the onset of old age. A few interviewees claimed that the boundary of old age is at the age of 45, while others suggested that it cannot be defined because it depends on an individual's wellbeing and condition. For this study, the range between 55 and 60 years was established as the boundary of the elderly development period (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2002, pp. 15, 263).

Among the features that characterise older people, the students who were surveyed indicated life experience (77.27%). Physical features such as wrinkles (62.12%) and grey hair (54.55%) were selected. Additionally, 22.73% paid attention to elderly people's smile or patience (19.70%), but also grumpiness (16.67%); only 7.58% of the respondents emphasised elderly people's positive attitude towards life.

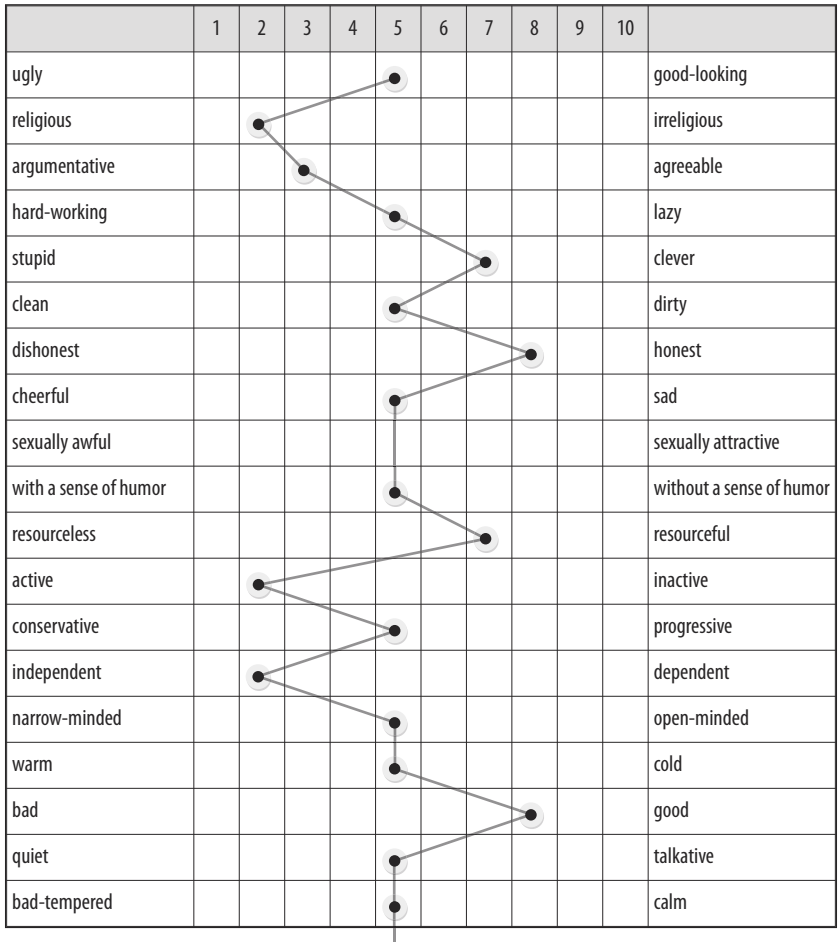
Pedagogy students associated late adulthood with life experience (54.55%), illnesses (40.91%), loneliness (31.82%), and death (25.76%). One third (33.33%) connected this period with devotion. The interviewees also indicated that old age is connected with plenty of spare time (33.33%) and relaxation (31.82%).

The results of the study suggest that the students of pedagogy have positive perceptions of elderly people. Among the positive characteristics, students indicated that they perceive older people as religious, wise, resourceful, active, independent, good, and dutiful. When it comes to

Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education
Vol. 10, 2021/2 No. 20

negative traits, they perceived older people as quarrelsome and unambitious. The features in which the respondents gave indifferent answers were as follows: ugly/good-looking, hard-working/lazy, clean/dirty, cheerful/sad, sexually awful/sexually attractive, with a sense of humor/without a sense of humor, conservative/progressive, narrow-minded/open-minded, warm/cold, quiet/talkative, bad-tempered/calm, collectivist/individualist, idealist/materialist, wealthy/poor, uptight/easy-going, proud/humble, straightforward/sneaky, uneducated/educated, and tidy/messy.

Figure 1. Features of Elderly People as Marked by Pedagogy Students



collectivist											individualist
idealist											materialist
unreliable											diligent
wealthy											poor
uptight											easy-going
proud											humble
straightforward											sneaky
uneducated											educated
tidy											messy
unambitious											ambitious

The respondents' knowledge about the elderly was claimed to have come from their grandparents (75.76%) and parents (54.55%). About one third (37.88%) of them suggested that the knowledge was gained from the elderly. The internet (22.73%) was also mentioned as a source of knowledge about the oldest generation. Teachers also played an important role for the respondents (16.67%), as did books (10.61%) and television (18.18%). Only a small percentage of the students mentioned priests (1.52%) or peers (1.52%) as a source of information in the matter.

It is worth emphasizing that the respondents have contact with the elderly in their families. Many of the students (34.85%) spend time with the elderly at least once a week, while for 27.27% it is a daily routine. Another 13.64% of the interviewees do it once a month and 10.61% every six months. A small percentage of them (3.03%) said it happens at the weekends or claimed that such contact was rare (3.03%); another 6.06% said they have no contact with the elderly at all.

When it comes to the circumstances in which the students spend time with elderly people, 63.64% of them visit family members. Some respondents (34.85%) meet them while shopping, while 24.24% of the interviewees lived with their grandparents or older parents. Only 6.06% of the pedagogy students worked with the elderly and none volunteered to work with old people. A small number of respondents (1.52%) mentioned

church as a place for contact with the elderly, and 1.52% take care of an elderly neighbor. Again, 6.06% stated that they do not have contact with older people at all.

Emotions towards the elderly were also researched. Mainly positive ones were mentioned: trust (66.67%) and joy (46.97%). When they think about the elderly, 18.18% of the respondents felt expectation, 21.21% sadness, 13.64% surprise, and only 1.52% anger. Some respondents (3.03%) mentioned fear as a feeling connected with the elderly. It is worth pointing out that none of the respondents mentioned disgust.

Although the respondents were all pedagogy students, many (43.94%) were acquainted with the topic of old age because of their studies; only 19.70% were willing to work with the elderly in the future. Almost half (45.45%) of the students had no opinions on the subject, while 34.85% did not want to work in that field. The young people associated working with the elderly with hygienic and care duties – such activities which, according to the students, are easier to be done with children than with the elderly.

Another interesting finding is the fact that 77.27% of the respondents had imagined their old age; only 22.73% had not thought about it. The students' own elderly age was perceived optimistically. It was thought of as time spent with family and friends. They dreamed of grandchildren, to whom they would devote their free time. Only a few students wrote that they would not live to old age; they would die lonely, bedridden, and grumpy with nobody to take care of them.

Summary

The research on the attitudes of the pedagogy students towards the elderly was carried out using an online survey with semantic differential questions. The small sample of 66 students came from only one university and it should be noted that 91% of the respondents were women. All of these factors may be relevant to the attitudes that the respondents revealed in the research. The results showed that pedagogy students have

positive, negative and neutral attitudes towards older people. Neutral attitudes seem particularly interesting for the author, as they may indicate an ambivalent character of attitudes towards the elderly. It also seems important to reflect on the formation of latent attitudes among students, an issue which may provide interesting material for further research.

It seems important to promote inter-generational contact and cooperation. One conclusion that can be drawn is that more subjects connected with the elderly should be introduced into curricula. Volunteer work, practical training, and internships in institutions and organizations which work with the elderly would be also important activities. The behavior of elderly people is also crucial. An openness towards younger generations and physical, intellectual, and social activities will develop positive perceptions of the elderly. Inter-generational cooperation brings different age groups closer and prevents younger people perceiving older ones as "a generation who move blindly, clumsily deal with obstacles, and unsuccessfully try to solve new problems" (Mead, 2000, p. 108), but as a generation who is willing to cooperate and make interpersonal contact.

References

Babbie, E. (2006). *Badania społeczne w praktyce* [Social Research in Practice]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Bartkowiak, G., Szklana-Berest, I., & Krugiełka, A. (2018). Postawy wobec osób starszych uczniów Medycznego Studium Zawodowego oraz studentów kierunków humanistycznych i niehumanistycznych (polskich i zagranicznych) [Attitudes Towards the Elderly of Students of the Medical Vocational College and Students of the Humanities and Non-Humanities (Polish and Foreign)]. *Pedagogika Społeczna*, *3*(69), 185–202.

Batorski, D., Olcoń-Kubicka, M. (2006). Prowadzenie badań przez Internet – Podstawowe zagadnienia metodologiczne [Conducting Research Via the Internet: Basic Methodological Issues]. *Studia Socjologiczne*, 3, 99–132.

Bokszański, Z. (1993). O czynnikach kształtujących obraz Polki i Polaków w świecie [On Factors Shaping the Image of Polish Women and Men in the World]. *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 1, 35–45.

Chimicz, D. (2017). Postrzeganie osób z niepełnosprawnością przez uczniów szkoły podstawowej. Przemiany w rezultacie oddziaływań edukacyjnych [Elementary School Pupils' Perceptions of People with Disabilities: Transformations as a Result of Educational Interactions]. *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, *2*(36), 149–169. DOI: 10.17951/lrp. 2017.36.2.149.

Cohen, E. S. (2001). The Complex Nature of Ageism: What Is It? Who Does It? Who Perceives It? *The Gerontologist*, *41*(5), 576–577.

Divilová, S. (2016). Semantic Differential as One of the Research Tools Suitable for Establishing the Attitudes of Pupils Towards Old Age and Seniors. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *4*(8), 1858–1862. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2016. 040815.

Fidelus, A. H. (2012). Postawy społeczne jako element kapitału społecznego a proces readaptacji społecznej skazanych [Social Attitudes as an Element of Social Capital and the Process of Social Readaptation of Convicts]. *Forum Pedagogiczne*, *1*(2), 84–124.

Harwas-Napierała, B., & Trempała, J. (2002). *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka. Charakterystyka okresów życia człowieka* [Psychology of Human Development: Characteristics of Periods of Human Life]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Leszczyńska-Rejchert, A. (2010). *Człowiek starszy i jego wspomaganie – w stronę pedagogiki starości*. [Older People and Their Support: Towards a Pedagogy of Old Age]. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego.

Maciążek, J., & Kurcz, I. (1992). *Stereotypy różnych narodowości występujące u dorosłych Polaków. Doniesienia z badań pilotażowych* [Stereotypes of Different Nationalities in Adult Poles: Reports From a Pilot Study]. In Z. Chlewiński & I. Kurcz (Eds.), *Stereotypy i uprzedzenia* [Stereotypes and Prejudices]. IP PAN.

Marody, M. (1976). *Sens teoretyczny a sens empiryczny pojęcia postawy* [The Theoretical Sense Versus the Empirical Sense of the Concept of Attitude]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Mead, M. (2000). *Kultura i tożsamość. Studium dystansu międzypokoleniowego* [Culture and Identity: A Study of Intergenerational Distance]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Mider, D. (2016). Jak badać opinię publiczną w Internecie? Ewaluacja wybranych technik badawczych [How to Research Public Opinion on the Internet? An Evaluation of Selected Research Techniques]. *Przegląd socjologiczny*, 1, 209–224.

Nierzewska, A., & Gurba, E. (2018). Wybrane uwarunkowania postaw osób u progu dorosłości wobec starości i seniorów [Selected Determinants of Attitudes of Persons at the Threshold of Adulthood Towards Old Age and Seniors]. *Psychologia rozwojowa*, *23*(4), 55–69.

Pilch, T., & Bauman, T. (2019). *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe* [Principles of Pedagogical Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Strategies]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Rubacha, K. (2008). *Metodologia badań nad edukacją* [Methodology of Education Research]. WAiP.

Szarota, Z. (2011). *Aktywizacja, rozwój, integracja – ku niezależnej starości* [Activation, Development, Integration: Towards Independent Old Age]. Krakowska Akademia im. Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego.

Szatur-Jaworska, B., Błędowski, P., & Dzięgielewska, M. (2006). *Podstawy gerontologii społecznej* [Basics of Social Gerontology]. Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR.

Śleszyński, D., & Wiśniewski, A. (1977). Dyferencjał Semantyczny jako metoda pomiaru preferencji dążeń życiowych (problemy teoretyczne i propozycje badawcze) [Semantic Differential as a Method for Measuring Life Aspiration

Preferences (Theoretical Problems and Research Proposals)]. *Studia Philosophiae Christianae*, *2*(13), 195–206.

Tokaj, A. (2008). *Starość w perspektywie studiów pedagogicznych* [Old Age in the Perspective of Pedagogical Studies]. Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna im. Króla Stanisława Leszczyńskiego.

Tuczyński, K., & Walat, W. (2019). Trójskładnikowa koncepcja postawy człowieka wobec wykorzystywania e-learningu w procesie kształcenia [A Three-Component Conception of Human Attitudes Towards the Use of E-Learning in the Educational Process]. *Edukacja – Technika – Informatyka*, *3*(29), 209–214. DOI: 10.15584/eti.2019.3.31.

Wojciszke, B. (2011). *Psychologia społeczna* [Social Psychology]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar".

Ździebło, K. (2008). Współczesne zjawiska demograficzne a problemy zdrowotne starzejącego się społeczeństwa [Contemporary Demographic Phenomena and Health Problems of an Aging Population]. *Studia Medyczne*, 9, 63–69.