

## THE STATUS OF SENIORS IN CZECH SOCIETY

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### Abstract

Perception of the old age and presence of seniors in the economically developed society have changed as against the past. It is clear that the aging based on the activity of the elderly has positive societal dimension. It is understood that the active aging becomes a required norm. Then it can be assumed that seniors group divides into those who will want or be able to live according to the principles of active aging and then those who are unwilling or unable to adapt. After the successful phase of life during its productive period many aged people are finding themselves at the edge of social environment. Their feeling of isolation, powerlessness and futility frequently manifests itself through disengagement and indifference of the seniors towards social events and towards themselves. Such an aged individual remains living alone and suffering by feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Opposite are those seniors who choose to take age and aging as a new pleasant stage of their life. Among the generally accepted characteristics of seniors fall experience, skills, wisdom, benevolence, sense of humor, insight, ability to see the world around them in depth and in context and to find the meaning of life and death as well.

The paper presented is analyzing the status of seniors in Czech society based on the analysis of significant aspects of their life. The underlying data have been obtained from a questionnaire survey among respondents aged 65+ and have been processed using statistical methods. The final part of the solution is the formulation of proposals and recommendations for improving the quality of life of seniors.

**Keywords:** Senior, aging, quality of life, discrimination, public events, social exclusion, social services, family, loneliness

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Length of human life is permanently getting extended thanks to medical, scientific and technical progress. However, within modern society, old age often means for its aged member a rapid descent from the top of labour and social status. In case, the senior person does not have a good family background and active personal interests, then a feeling of isolation, powerlessness and futility can arise. The elderly then become indifferent towards social life and towards themselves. Such an aged individual often remains living alone

and suffering by feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Opposite are those seniors who choose to take age and aging as a new pleasant stage of their life, when they can at last dedicate themselves fully to their interests, families, travel, education and transfer of their experience to younger generation. Advanced societies contribute by own social programmes to dignified old age. Anyway, such efforts of the State cannot replace the somehow damaged intergeneration family and emotional relations caused by the chase of economically active people after permanent increase of their level of living and social status.

Within Czech society there still is a strong intergeneration solidarity and family relations. People are certain of the need of mutual support of family members across generations. Sample surveys have shown that, at one side good family relations are mostly declared, at the other side separate living of generations is prevalently preferred (Možný et al., 2016). Common three-generation life, and most of all, common living of married couples or individuals of the medium-aged generation together with one of the parents, have been reported rather exceptionally and have not been considered desirable (Rychtaříková, 2002).

Care of not self-sufficient seniors within Czech family has been understood a moral obligation and duty. In spite of the research outcomes presented so far and showing this can burden the family relations to a degree, family members consider it obligatory to care for the aging relatives (Tošnerová, 2002). It is seen from the surveys that, a quarter of the number of seniors cannot take care of themselves independently. About 80 - 90 % of the persons older than 65 years are self-sufficient with the aid of family and the close environment (Kopecká, 2002). Due to the increasing number of elderly in the population, the family responsibility for their care increases, too. This situation creates a need for new technological systems that allow relatives to be in contact with older family members throughout the day. The results of the pilot survey (Warpenius, Alasaarela, Sorvoja and Kinnunen, 2015) show that, such mobile services are an important element of intergenerational communication of older people and their relatives. The study authors recommend the introduction of mobile services to improve the quality of life of seniors in an aging society. Authors Miranti and Yu (2015) reported in the analysis of research of age category 65+, that higher education and incomes, and thus better health conditions and former experience in the job, are important protective factors against social exclusion. Based on the examination of specific cases of social exclusion of the elderly a transversal approach to solutions is suggested (Emmanuelle and Tartiere, 2015). Prevention of possible social exclusion has to be looked at both from the economic and medico-psycho-social perspective.

The paper deals with an analysis of significant life aspects of life of the elderly in the current Czech society. The research examines economic and social positions of the seniors and a part of the outcomes is dedicated to social contacts and leisure activities of theirs. A questionnaire survey done on 238 respondents over 65 years of age has served for the data source.

## 2. METHODS

Analysis of the qualitative phenomena relationships

A relationship between the qualitative statistical data may be called an association or the contingency. Association refers to a relationship between alternative statistical variables assuming two only values (varieties). Contingency analyzes a relationship between qualitative attributes of which at least one is of a multiple (non-alternative) nature. When relationships between the qualitative statistical attributes are being examined, data available usually come from sampling. It is good to find out then, whether they are related and whether generalization of the results obtained from the sample upon the original population is possible. Such questions can be answered using testing procedures where statistical significance of the relationship between two qualitative attributes under study is verified. In the present solution  $\chi^2$  test has been used. The test is based on null hypothesis assuming in dependence of the two attributes. The test criterion is defined in generally:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^k \sum_{j=1}^m \frac{(n_{ij} - o_{ij})^2}{o_{ij}}, \quad (2.1)$$

where  $n$  .....size of the sample,

$n_{ij}$  .....observed frequency,

$o_{ij}$  .....expected (theoretical) frequency,

$i = 1, 2, \dots, k$ , where  $k$  is the number of varieties of one attribute,

$j = 1, 2, \dots, m$ , where  $m$  is the number of varieties of the other attribute.

Theoretical frequencies are obtained as product of the corresponding marginal frequencies over the total population size. The  $\chi^2$  test criterion has  $\chi^2$  distribution at  $[(k-1)(m-1)]$  degrees of freedom. In case,  $\chi^2$  test criterion value obtained exceeds the  $\chi^2_{\alpha}$  critical value at  $\alpha$  significance level and  $[(k-1)(m-1)]$  degrees of freedom, null hypothesis of independence between the two attributes can be rejected at  $\alpha$  level of significance or, alternative hypothesis assuming a significant relationship (correlation) between the two attributes can be supported. Probability of the assumed correlation then is  $(1-\alpha)$ .

Measurement of the degree of relationship between qualitative attributes

Measurement of the degree of a statistical dependence between qualitative statistical attributes can be performed using either  $\chi^2$  coefficients or the prediction measures. Considering nature of the survey and its organisation the analytical part of research has used measures based on the  $\chi^2$  method. In general contingency tables the degree of the relationship is assessed using the coefficient of mean square contingency C (Pearson contingency coefficient):

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n + \chi^2}}, \quad (2.2)$$

where the  $\chi^2$  quantity is again defined by (2.1) and  $n$  is the sample size.

The Pearson coefficient of contingency assumes zero value in case of a total independence between two qualitative statistical attributes, and it approaches the unity limit in case of a total dependence.

The degree of relationship in a contingency table has also been measured using Cramér V coefficient :

$$V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n(h-1)}}, \quad \text{where } h = \min(k, m). \quad (2.3)$$

### 3. AGE IN CZECH ENVIRONMENT

The WHO (UN World Health Organisation) classifies a population from the age viewpoint in the following age classes: 30-44 years adult age, 45-59 years medium age, 60-74 years early old age, then 75-89 years later old age and 90+ years longevity. Within the current modern societies, departure for pension is considered start of the old age. Social age is then mentioned in this case, when a person transits from the productive part of life to the post-productive one (Pacovský, 1990). The social age includes changes of social roles and needs, lifestyle and economic security as well. Life expectancy at birth has been 75.8 years in Czech males (2014) and 81.7 years in females (2014).

#### 3.1 Economic situation of Czech seniors

The Czech pension system is based on two pillars. Firstly, there is the mandatory legal social insurance into which both the citizen and his/her employer contribute during productive life, and from which then pension is paid. The second pillar is optional and the State supports this form of citizens' pension insurance by a State contribution. Anyway, for most people retirement means not only acceptance of the new status (a pensioner), but a significant income drop. The Table 1 illustrates differences in household expenses structure between employees and pensioners in the Czech Republic.

Table 1. Household expenses structure in pensioners and employees in Czech Republic 2014 (%).

Goods and services category	Pensioners	Employees
Foodstuffs and soft drinks	24.4	18.9
Alcoholic drinks, tobacco	3.1	2.6
Clothing and footwear	2.9	5.3
Housing, water, energy	28.9	20.2
Household equipment	5.3	5.7
Health	4.4	2.1
Transport	6.9	12.5
Post and telecommunications	3.9	4.3
Recreation, culture, sports	8.0	9.4
Education	0.1	0.7
Catering and accomodation services	2.9	5.9
Other goods and services	9.2	12.4

Source: Czech Statistical Office

#### Seniors in families:

There are still strong family relationships and inter-generation solidarity in the Czech society. However, the former surveys show a clear preference to separate living of generations. Living of three generations together happens rather exceptionally and is not considered desirable. With his/her age increasing and health status aggravating, the senior is becoming dependent on aid of another person. It has been assessed that, 80 - 90 % persons over 65 are self-sufficient with the aid of their families and close neighbourhood (Kopecká, 2002).

### **3.2 Social services aimed at seniors in CR**

To help the seniors remain in their original environment is a general endeavour. For the case of a need of assistance or another aid usually in the area of personal hygiene, household cleaning, shopping, catering and contact with doctors, a system of care service has been established by the State with extensive help of both non-profit and private organizations. Its workers visit the client in his/her home environment. The requested form of social care combining individual living with providing the services needed are the nursing homes. Part of these facilities is centers of personal hygiene, laundry, doctor's surgery, clubs and various leisure activities. The basic type of institutional care for the elderly are retirement homes and special homes. Interest in this form of aid greatly exceeds the capacity existing although alongside municipal and State institutions there are a number of private facilities.

For reimbursement of the services provided by care service or of stays in retirement homes the "care allowance" is available. This is a State-funded benefit, differentiated by the degree of dependence of the person with long-term adverse health conditions. The amount available is intended to cover part of the cost of social services, the long-term provision of which is necessary to maintain a decent life for persons with disabilities.

### **3.3 Empirical research and its outcomes**

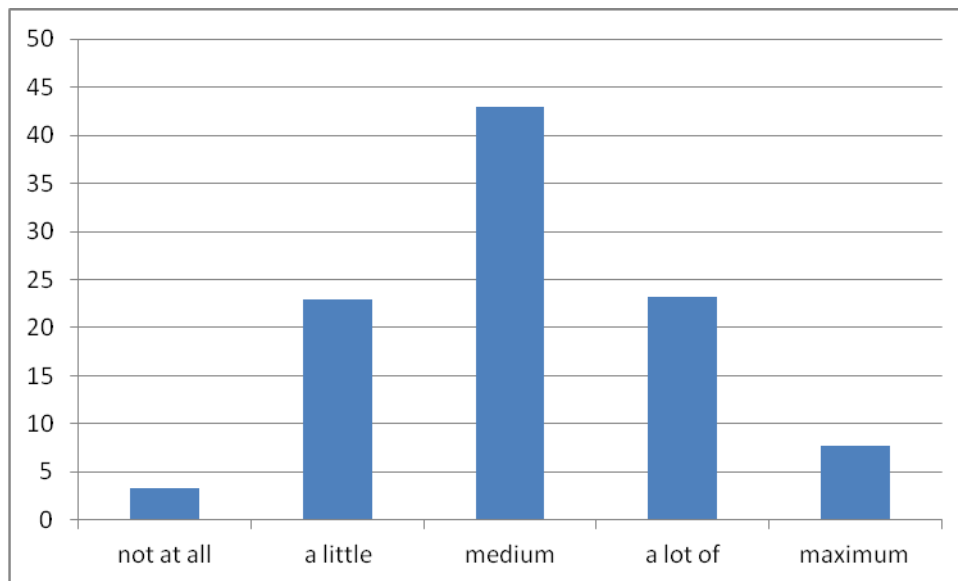
238 respondents aged 65 and more participated in the questionnaire survey, of which there were 102 males and 136 females. 80 % of respondents were 65-74 years old. 77.3 % of respondents had descendants. More than a quarter of respondents have been living alone, 40.8% with a partner.

#### Self-esteem of life changes and attitudes

Free decision-making is natural in people living within developed economies but in the elderly it is often perceived very personally. There were 15.5 % respondents in the sample having a feeling of a limited space

for free decision-making and 21 % having a feeling of underestimation of the elderly by the society. Results of satisfaction assessment concerning the current life stage are seen in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. Level of satisfaction of the elderly with their current life (%).

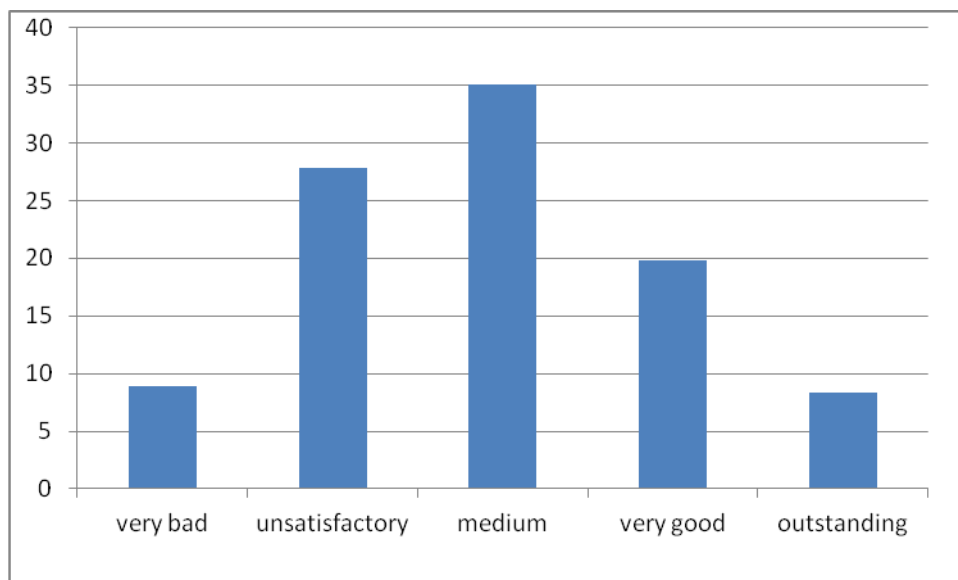


Source: Questionnaire survey

#### Social contacts and leisure activities of the elderly

Ways and frequency of contacts with family and friends are an important factor affecting human psychology. One fifth of the respondents are in personal contacts with their families several times a week, but 21.95 % of the elderly see their families seldom, out of which 7.25 % have no family contacts at all. An assessment of family relations of the elderly is offered in Fig. 2.

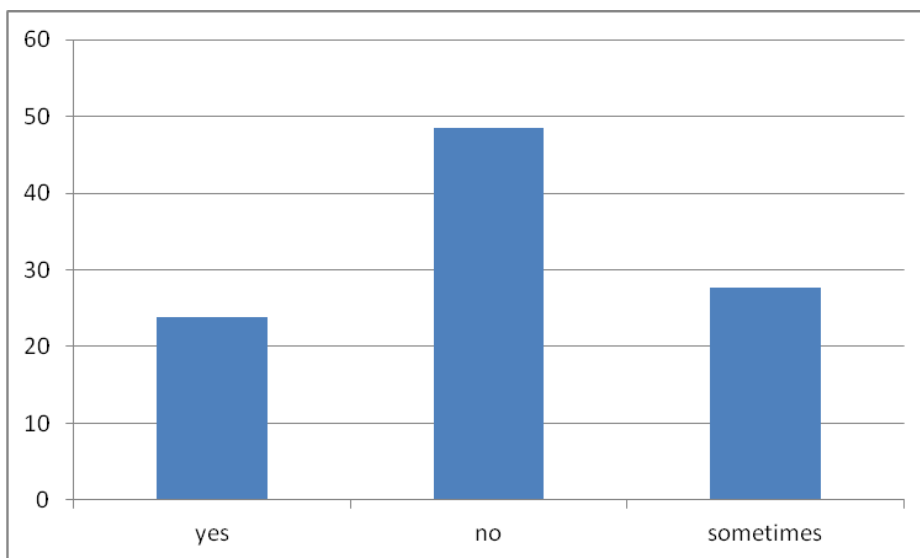
Figure 2. Assessment of family relationships (%).



Source: Questionnaire survey

Contacts with family and with friends affect the feeling of one's isolation indisputably. A higher degree of loneliness understandably can be felt by people who live alone, but also by people living in homes for the elderly. On the contrary, residents of nursing homes participate in social life and do not feel lonely. The Fig. 3 brings assessment of the degree of loneliness within the sample of respondents.

Figure 3. Assessment of the degree of loneliness (%).



Source: Questionnaire survey

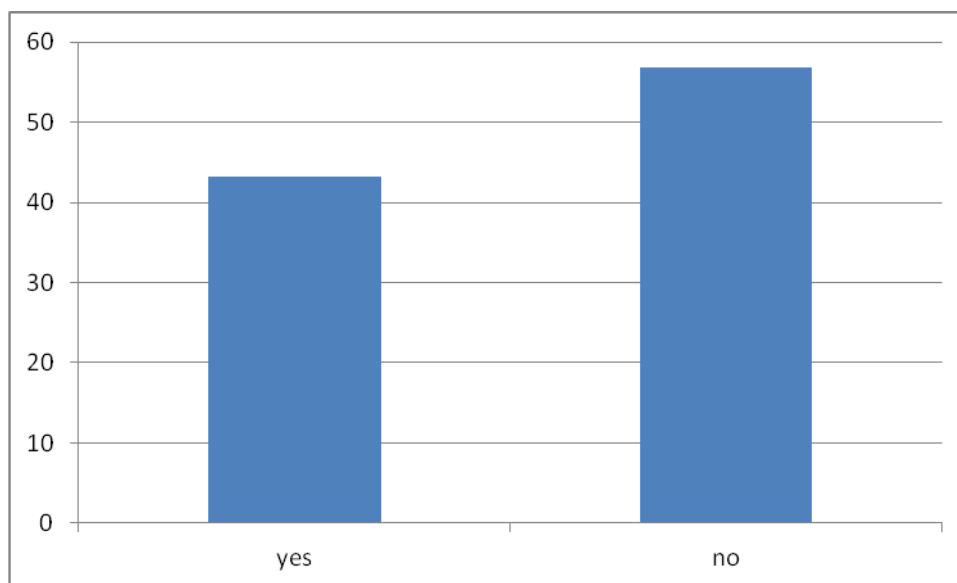
#### Interest in public events

The age class of seniors in the population is standing at the top of life experience. Their decision-making proceeds with insight, with wisdom and without undue emotion. Younger generations should listen to the elders and learn to negotiate and decide properly, from their experience. Some 5 % of the respondents participated actively in public events and 65.4 % of the elderly are interested in public events and politics. Seniors usually spend their free time together with family and in household maintenance. 8.95 % spend their free time in some form of study and 13.4 % with their friends.

#### Discrimination

Discrimination against the elderly has become a very serious problem of our time. It appears not only in the labour area, but in the social domain, too, and even in families. Sometimes it happens that the problem turns up into the abuse of seniors and various forms of domestic violence. It is very difficult to prove manifestations of discrimination since seniors are silent about these because of shame or fears of further attacks or sanctions. Feelings of discrimination in seniors are represented in Fig. 4.

Figure 4. Feelings of discrimination in seniors (%)



Source: Questionnaire survey

Analysis of the relationships between sociodemographic characteristics and selected categories

Education, age, current way of living and family background affect the feelings of a person in a higher age category more than with younger people. After construction of contingency tables for selected connections between the properties, the  $\chi^2$  test has been applied (formula 2.1) and the strength of relationship has been measured using formulas (2.2) and (2.3). Results of statistical analyses are presented in Tab. 2

Table 2. Results of statistical analyses

Relationship	Test criterion	p-value	Strength of relationship (C, V)
Education and interest in public life	1.941	0.585	0.09
Age and use of social services	24.928	0.000052	0.308
Way of living and feeling of loneliness	33.693	0.0000009	0.352
Family background and life satisfaction	4.213	0.122	0.132

Source: Questionnaire survey

It is obvious from statistical assessment of the questionnaire survey results that seniors' interest in public life is not affected by education. Everyone has the chance to participate in public events.

Use of social services is connected with age. The elderly are struggling to be self-sufficient and independent of their surroundings. Anyway, with age increasing their health status, independence and self-sufficiency are aggravating. A frequent solution of aid in such situation is the use of social services. Moving of the elderly into smaller flats is not very frequent in Czech Republic. As far as they may be forced to it due to economic reasons, most of them take such a change negatively. As a still worse change a departure for some of the residential social care homes can be felt by them. They feel lonely in the new environment and they often isolate themselves from the remaining inhabitants of the home. Computation results show a medium strong dependence of the feeling of loneliness on the way of living ( $\chi^2 = 33.693$ ,  $C = 0.352$ ). Life satisfaction reflects the psyche of man, therefore even a good family background is not sufficient in the way of improvement of the life satisfaction feeling ( $C = 0.132$ ).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The problem of European population aging is standing at the middle of demographers' and economists' attention. While on the one hand the life expectancy at birth increases, on the other hand the retirement age is extended. The retirement age ceiling has been approved at 65 years both for men and women in Czech Republic (it concerns those born after 1965). Demographic age is a specific social, economic and psychological phenomenon. The elderly feel themselves at best within their family milieu, however, not a little share of them live isolated, with a feeling of powerlessness and futility. It has been found by research that, 43.25 % feel certain markers of discrimination. In spite of this, 70.55 % are interested in public life, out of which 5.15 % even actively. Some seniors make use of their free time in education (8.95 %) and 13.4 % spend their free whiles with their friends. The care for seniors should be a priority both for the State and families. Society should listen to aged people, understand their needs and create conditions of dignified aging according to those. This stage of life, namely, with a little luck, waits for everyone of us.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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