

## Assessment of Gullibility of Older Patients is Important for their Safety and Health

Andrzej Brodziak<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Renata Zlotkowska<sup>1,3</sup> and Alicja Różyk-Myrta<sup>2</sup>

1. Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Sosnowiec, Poland

2. Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Applied Sciences, Nysa, Poland

3. Faculty of Public Health, Department of Social Medicine and Prophylaxis, Medical University of Silesia, Bytom, Poland

Email : [andrzejbrodziak@wp.pl](mailto:andrzejbrodziak@wp.pl)

### ABSTRACT:

Increased gullibility makes a person vulnerable to manipulations. The gullible people are often victims of scams or frauds. Scam crimes are a significant problem in civil justice procedures and criminal investigations. The repercussion of gullibility can be especially seen among older people. Elderly people seem particularly vulnerable to scam. Thus, the frequency and intensity of gullibility and the ways to assess this vulnerability are in particular a problem in the field of geriatric care and in general in care for the well-being of elderly people. Surprisingly, so far, almost no scientific studies have been attempted to assess the degree of dependence between the age of patients and intensity of gullibility. Also, the factors that influence the existence of this particular personality trait have not been examined yet extensively. The purpose of this short commentary is therefore to stimulate the investigations, which will lead to the development of methods detecting increased gullibility in older people. This will make possible to include to the principles of care for the elderly the advices that would reduce the risk of becoming a victim of deceptions. If it were possible to determine methods of belittling credulity, it would also improve the quality of many activities in the field of care for the elderly. The authors consider the state of contemporary knowledge related to notation of gullibility and methods of its assessment. They emphasize that there is almost no publication on this subject in medical literature. Increased gullibility makes a person vulnerable to manipulations. The gullible ie. most innocent people are often victims of scam. Elderly people and innocent people are particularly vulnerable to scam and fraud. Thus, the frequency and intensity of gullibility and the ways to its assessment are in particular important in the field of geriatric care. The authors quote some selected items of the proposed self-report measure of gullibility, elaborated recently for evaluations in general population. They argue that the assessment of the prevalence of gullibility is important for the state of public mental health, because

widespread gullibility facilitate manipulations of members of a community and promotions of xenophobic, nationalistic attitudes and populist promises. And then the authors discuss the necessary investigations on the methods of assessment of gullibility among elderly and on the spread of this trait of personality in different age groups of patients. The scale developed by Alessandro Teunisse is designed to assess the level of gullibility in the general population. It seems that further research is needed to develop a scale for testing older people and elderly patients. The quoted fragment of Teunisse's scale allows an approximate assessment of gullibility in the elderly. Apart from presenting to the patient the quoted questions, it is possible during conversation with him to counsel guarding him against the consequences of his mental state, especially giving him attention to the above-mentioned "ability and motivation to detect cues of untrustworthiness". It should be noted that recently the importance of the assessment of the prevalence of gullibility for the state of public mental health has been recognized [9]. In a situation where many citizens are significantly gullible it is possible to manipulate easily members of such a community. It is easy then to promote xenophobic, nationalistic attitudes and populist promises. Especially the older people are particularly vulnerable to such manipulations. It seems that a slightly different, special measurement scale would be needed for the purpose of studying the relationship between the prevalence of the above-mentioned social attitudes and the level of gullibility. One should also consider differences in the meaning of similar notions such as credulity and naiveté. The mean level of gullibility is also important for the quality of the results of all teaching programs. Good learning outcomes can only be achieved if the criticism of thinking is a feature considered as valuable. The issue of credulity and the methods of its evaluation should be known to people involved in health care of the elderly, because older people are in particular vulnerable to scam and fraud. If a significant number of people in a certain community is gullible, then promoting of xenophobic, nationalist attitudes by people promoting the populist program it's easier. The public mental health is then impaired. Good

quality of education requires the promotion of critical thinking. Further research is needed on the methods of assessing the level of gullibility and on the spread of considerable gullibility in different age groups and different clinical situations.

Keywords: Gullibility; Credulity; Naiveté; Self-report measure of gullibility geriatric medicine; Elderly health care; Public mental health