

## Nurses Towards Older People and Own Ageing

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### Abstract

Ageing of the population and emergence of problems related to this process constitutes a basis for cross-disciplinary research. Old age is a natural part of a human life cycle and is a complex, genetically conditioned process which can be modified by environmental factors. Forecasts presented by the Central Statistical Office (Polish government agency concerned with collecting and publishing statistical data) indicate a clear tendency for extension of average life expectancy. It is estimated that in year 2035, one in four people will be above the age of 65. A high number of elderly people in the society concerns Poland as well. The need for medical and social services is relatively growing. The elderly are also the main beneficiaries of health care in terms of care benefits. The article presents the attitudes of nurses both towards the elderly people and their own ageing in terms of the general public. Results of own research has been compared with that made by the Centre of Public Opinion Research (Polish opinion polling institute).

**Keywords:** Senility; Ageing process; Care; Attitude towards old age

### Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to determine the influence of the care services performed by nurses employed on different positions on the attitude towards the elderly people as well as their own ageing.

### Introduction

Ageing society is a problematic issue for many countries worldwide. Several years ago, Poland has also become an ageing society, which is a result of a decreasing birth rate and the extension of average life expectancy.

For decades, the support from Polish national institutions was provided almost entirely for those elderly people who experienced poverty, incapacitation, loneliness or suffered from various diseases [1,2]. Since 2012, the social policy model has changed, concerning Poland's ageing population. The government has begun to value healthy ageing as well as independent, satisfactory, and dignified life in old age [3-5]. These changes occurred due to an increasing activity of the elderly, which has a direct influence on the society's attitude towards them as well as their own perception of their old age [6].

By the end of 2013, people aged 65 and above constituted over 18.4% of total population (5.7 million people) [7-9]. According to estimates, this percentage is going to increase in years to come. It is necessary to promote a model of social co-existence in which this state of matters is accepted [10].

### Study Materials and Methods

The research was conducted in 2015 among 213 nurses furthering their qualifications at the University of Applied Sciences in Nysa and Medical University in Sosnowiec, the students of bridging studies and

master's degree studies. Nurses who took part in the survey were aged between 24 and 54. The largest group in the research was represented by nurses aged 45-54, N-86 (40,4%), then those aged 35-44, N-80 (37,6%) and 25-34, N-34 (16%) consecutively. Nurses aged 24, and below, N-13 (6,1%), constituted the smallest group in the research.

**The analysis of the research material was made based on the following parameters:**

- Age structure ratio,
- Chi-squared test,
- Pearson's Chi-square,
- Chi-square with highest reliability.

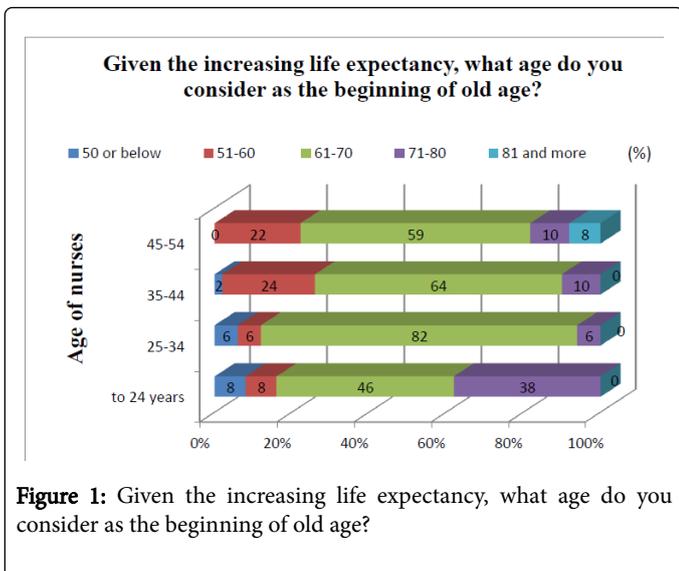
Calculations were performed using Statistica PL software and Microsoft Office Excel. To achieve the aim of the study, a diagnostic survey with a questionnaire was used.

The results of the research concerning nurses were compared with those provided by Centre of Public Opinion Research, in studies conducted on a random representative sample of adult inhabitants of Poland, with the size of 922 people. The studies were conducted in 2000, 2009 and 2012.

### Results

In recent years, the border between young and old age has shifted in the public reception. In the last five years, the threshold of old age has moved by 1 year and 7 months (which is explicitly indicated in the 2009 and 2012 research carried out by CBOS-Centre for Public Opinion Research).

The perception of subsequent life stages is largely dependent on the respondents' age, which was confirmed in the research done by CBOS and the survey carried out among nurses. For older respondents, the old age begins later than for the younger ones (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Given the increasing life expectancy, what age do you consider as the beginning of old age?

The nurses estimate the beginning of old age similarly to the CBOS research respondents. In the research analysed in this article, the threshold of old age differed, depending on the respondents' age.

According to the youngest respondents (aged 24 or below and 25-34), old age begins at the age of 50 or earlier N-30 (14%). None of the older nurses specified the beginning of old age as 50 or below.

The next question was aimed at examining the attitudes of various social environments towards the elderly.

According to CBOS, seniors most frequently experience indifference in healthcare facilities, local offices, coming from young people, on the streets and in public transport.

In the nurses' responses, Church and family are among the friendliest environments. Less than a half of seniors are treated with kindness, according to the nurses' responses. Much more respondents indicated indifference in their replies.

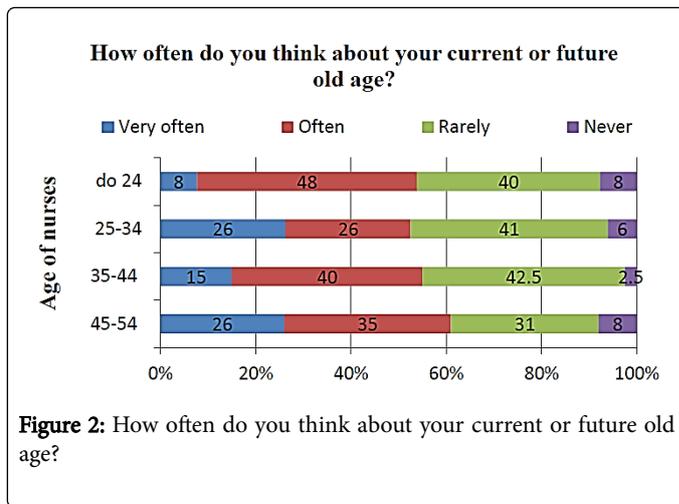
According to them, the indifference towards the elderly can be mainly observed in shops, on the streets, in public transport and local offices as well as coming from young people.

The next question was "Do you think about your old age, both current and future one?"

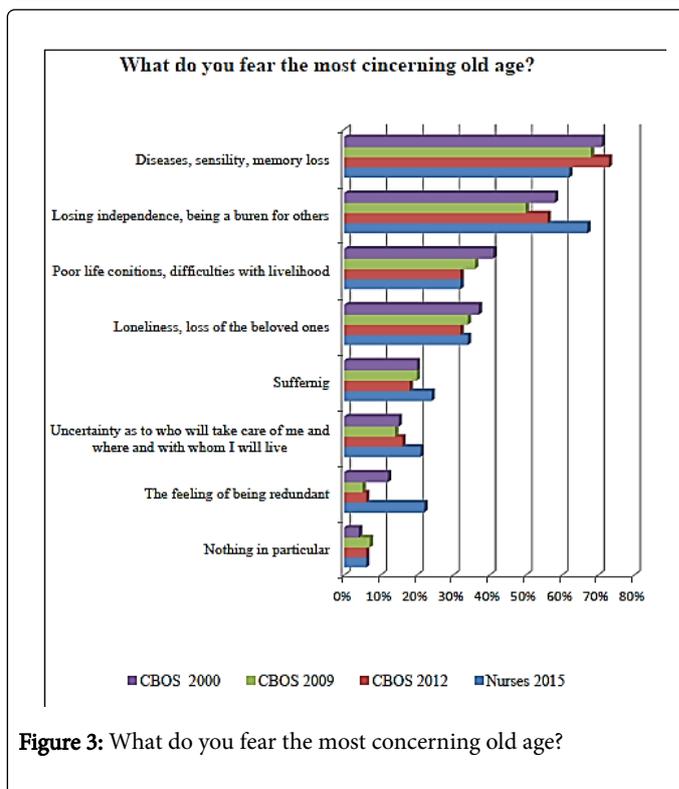
Respondents' answers from the Centre of Public Opinion Research survey show that 72% of them think about their ageing, 16% of which do it very often. In accordance with the presumptions, young people think about ageing least often, whereas almost half of respondents aged above 65 does it very frequently. Among those declaring that they frequently think about ageing are more women N-507 (55%) than men N-415 (45%) (Figure 2).

The nurses' answers indicate that N-121 (56.9%) of them think about ageing, N-25 (20.7%) of which do it very frequently. The youngest respondents think about ageing least frequently.

According to CBOS, regardless of age and life situation, N-627 (68%) respondents are afraid of diseases and senility when thinking about old age. Every second person (50%) is afraid of losing autonomy, becoming dependent on other people and being a burden for them (Figure 3).



**Figure 2:** How often do you think about your current or future old age?



**Figure 3:** What do you fear the most concerning old age?

The majority of surveyed nurses fear that they will become a burden for other people and lose autonomy, N-143 (67.1%), while 62% are afraid of diseases, senility and memory loss.

Two thirds of the respondents wish to live in their own flats and benefit from short-term aid from their relatives, friends or neighbors. Only 12% think about being entirely dependent on their relatives.

More than a half of the surveyed nurses, N-115 (54%) would prefer to live in their own flats and benefit from short-term aid from their family or friends (Figure 4).

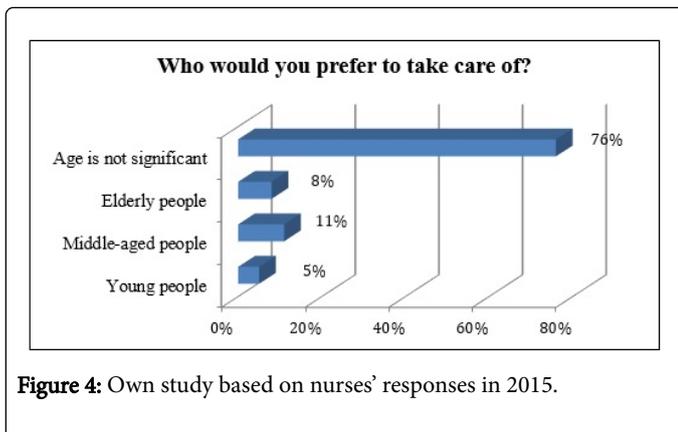


Figure 4: Own study based on nurses' responses in 2015.

In response to the following question: "Who would you prefer to take care of?"; the majority of respondents (76.5%) said that age is insignificant. The nurses were additionally asked about care provision.

## Conclusion

The perception of old age is influenced by cultural and historical conditions as well as tradition. Addressing the problem of talking about old age is crucial, as various stereotypes have created a perception of a senior as a person different from others.

The presence of both positive and negative stereotypes distorts the actual image of old age and the elderly, which often stigmatizes them in a certain way. It is often forgotten that old age is a natural life stage.

A rapid increase of the elderly in the population poses a major challenge the country's social policy. It requires the development of certain governmental programs and preparation of professional staff for health care, which would facilitate healthy ageing as well as socially and economically beneficial life of the elderly.

The seniors have the right to live a life a full, dignified life and the acknowledgement of their potential, which can be used with benefit for the society, if provided the necessary conditions.

Minor differences can be observed in the assessment of the attitude towards the elderly in various social environments. Some respondents pointed to less kind and more indifferent behaviour towards the elderly coming from their neighbours.

Thinking about the old age was also more frequent than in case of the general public.

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