
GRANDPARENTS EVALUATING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

**Gabriela-Maria Man, PhD Student, Al. Ioan Cuza” University of Iași
Nicoleta-Maria Turliuc, Prof., PhD, ”Al. Ioan Cuza” University of Iași**

Abstract: Older adults present many changes on emotional and relational level. These changes tend to converge generally more on positive elements comparatively with members of other generations, especially at the level of social interactions. This fact is checked also in the case of the relation between elderly grandparents and their grandchildren. In the frames of this study the elderly grandparents have evaluated the behaviour of their grandchildren. We started from the premise that the grandparents and parents will evaluate different the behaviour of the grandchildren/children. In the evaluation of grandchild/child's behaviour not just aspects related to status (grandparents/parents) are taken into consideration, but also aspects related to gender. At the same time aspects referring to the perception of the future in the relation with the grandchild/child are also investigated.

Keywords: evaluation of grandchild/child's behaviour, perception of the future, old age.

Numerous are the differences between elder and younger adults. The elderly and younger adults do not differ only physically, but also emotionally and relationally. Multiple emotional and relational aspects differentiate the ages, and in old age they tend to improve (Smith et al., 2009; Fingerma n & Charles, 2010; Scheibe & Carstensen, 2010; Luong, Charles, & Fingerma n, 2011; Mather, 2012). These changes are often related to how the elders select and process the emotional and relational information.

Age differences in the assessment of positive aspects - the elders focus on positive aspects.

Numerous studies have found age differences in regard to the preferences of the elderly for positive aspects and information as compared to younger adults (Charles, Mather, & Carstensen, 2003; Carstensen și Mikele, 2005; Mather, & Carstensen, 2005; Mather, 2006; Isaacowitz, 2012; Isaacowitz & Blanchard-Fields, 2012; Mather, 2012), a trend called *positivity effect* (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). For example there are age differences regarding the information that a person remembers. Compared to younger people, the elderly remember more positive aspects than negative (Charles et al., 2003; Mather & Knight, 2005; Mather, 2006), while young adults remember positive and negative aspects approximately equally (Mather & Knight, 2005). In a study by Kennedy, Mather și Carstensen (2004) the elderly people tended to remember personal information from the past in a much more optimistic manner and with more positive elements than they used to remember the same event in the past, and also compared with the information recalled by young adults. Not only the elderly remember more positive information than those from the other ages, they also recognize more positive visual aspects than negative (Charles et al., 2003).

Attention showed a similar trend, namely to focus on the positive aspects (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Compared to the young adults, when the elderly need to focus their attention on faces expressing different emotions (positive, negative, neutral) they focus more

on the positive ones, and avoid the negative ones (Nikitin & Freund, 2011). At the same time, they react less intense to contact with negative situations (Mather, 2012)

Another age difference in terms of age pertains to the fact that the elderly tend to look for positive information regardless their mood, while the young adults select negative information when they are sad, and positive information when they have a positive mood (Isaacowitz, Toner, Goren & Wilson, 2008).

These differences between ages are also valid for the assessment of relational aspects. For example, the elderly tend to focus more on avoiding negative experiences and promote positive ones (Luong et al., 2011); the older people also remember more intense positive social experiences with others compared to the negative ones (Charles & Piazza, 2007); they evaluate their relations with others as being closer, positive, and with less negative elements (Winkeler, Filipp & Boll 2000; Birditt & Fingerman, 2003; Lefkowitz & Fingerman 2003; Fingerman Hay, & Birditt, 2004; Luong et al., 2011). They also report that they have fewer complaints in communication with social partners, regardless the age of the people they are interacting with, compared to young adults (Chan & King, 2002). According to Winkeler et al. (2000), the elderly parents have the tendency to see the relationships with their children as characterized by openness and affection, they also perceive fewer conflicts. According to Fingerman (1995), elderly mothers evaluate differently their relationship to their daughters during conflicts. When the mothers evaluated the experiences of their daughters regarding the conflict situations, they were attributing more positive feelings than the daughters had reported.

Therefore, there are sufficient reasons to assume that there are differences in the evaluation of the behavior of children/grandchildren depending on who performs this evaluation, and these differences are related with the greater availability of elderly grandparents to focus on the positive behaviors / aspects, and the tendency of younger adults (children's parents) to take into account the negative aspects as well.

Time and future time perception.

Explanations regarding the orientation of elderly compared to young adults on the positive aspects of interactions with others can be brought by the socioemotional selectivity theory. According to this theory, motivation changes in old age under the pressure of time limitation the elder has to live; the elder seeks more than in any other age to achieve momentarily satisfaction in the relationships with others (Carstensen, 1993; Carstensen & Charles, 1998); to achieve this goal will focus on the positive aspects (Charles et al., 2003). In other words, the perception of time influences motivation, and motivation will influence the person's orientation towards the positive aspects around. There are many studies that confirm that people who face limitations of time caused by age or momentarily alterations for younger adults, value more the emotional goals with others (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fung, Carstensen, & Lutz 1999; Fung & Carstensen, 2006). Therefore, there are prerequisites for taking into account the fact that those people who perceive time as being limited in the relationship are motivated to perceive and implicitly to evaluate the behavior of children / grandchildren as characterized by several positive elements.

The purposes of this study were to examine the differences in the behavior evaluation made by adults taking into account the status of the adults (parent/grandparent) and the adults gender. Another purpose is to stress the relation between future time perspective in the relationship on the one hand and behavior evaluation on the other hand. It is also emphasized the relationship between age and future time perspective in the relationship.

Method

Participants

The participants ($N = 200$) were 100 grandparents and 100 parents. 50 grandparents were men and 50 women. 50 parents were women and 50 were men. Participants were recruited through local churches by priests. 82 participants were from urban areas and 118 participants were from the suburban areas of the Târgu-Mureș city. The grandparents were over 65 years old ($M = 70.6$, $SD = 5.7$). Parents age was between 29 and 52 years old ($M = 37.7$, $SD = 4.6$). There were differences in the education level between parent and grandparents: 59% grandparents had low education (8 grades or less) but only 3% of parents had 8 grades or less.

Materials

The participants in this research completed three self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed directly at home by researchers and priests. They also gathered the participants' questionnaires four days later after they were completed.

To assess the way in which participants evaluate their children/grandchildren behavior we used Positive Behavior Scale. The original scale has 25 items and was used first for the New Chance study (Quint, Bos, & Polit, 1997). The items of the scale include positive behavior descriptions of three dimensions: social competence and sensitivity ("gets along well with other kids") ; compliance and self-control ("waits his or her turn during activities") and autonomy ("does things for him/her self, is self-reliant") it also allows to calculate an overall score. In this study participants completed a short version of the questionnaire (10 items). Parents rated their answer on a five-point scale ranging from "not at all like my child" to "totally like my child" and grandparents used a five-point scale ranging from "not at all like my grandchild" to "totally like my grandchild". The grandparent's scale is the parent's version from the original, only adapted. The scale is highly reliable both short and original version (Epps, Park, Huston, Ripke, 2003).

To assess both parent/grandparent's perception of time in the relationship we used a scale developed by Fingerma, Miller and Charles (2008) Future Time Perspective of Relationship based on FTP scale. The participants had to rate their answer to seven statements ("Many opportunities to spend time with this person await me in the future", "I've begun to realize that time left to spend with this person is becoming limited") on a seven-point scale ranging from "very untrue" to "very true".

Participant also completed a demographic questionnaire. The questions were related to: age, gender, education and domicile.

Results

Evaluation of the behavior of children / grandchildren

To verify the hypothesis pertaining to the assessment of the behavior of children / grandchildren by gender and status (parent or grandparent), the ANOVA 2X2 (Status X Gender) analysis of variance was used for independent measures.

In this study we assumed that there will be differences in the evaluation of children behaviors. It was hypothesized that parents and grandparents will evaluate differently their children and grandchildren. At the same time, there will also be differences by the gender of the evaluator.

The results highlighted that there are differences in evaluations of the behaviors depending on status: the parents and grandparents will evaluate children/grandchildren differently $F(1, 196) = 5.311, p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .026$. Instead there is no gender differences on the evaluation of children / grandchildren made by the adults $F(1, 196) = 0.855, p = .356, \eta_p^2 = .004$.

$F(1, 196) = 0.084, p = .774$ indicate an insignificant effect of the gender and status factors on the evaluation of children / grandchildren behavior.

Table 1
Means for parents and grandparents.

| Gender | Status | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|--------|---------|--------|----------------|-----|
| M | Parent | 3.7240 | .47833 | 50 |
| | Grandp. | 3.5780 | .52733 | 50 |
| | Total | 3.6510 | .50622 | 100 |
| F | Parent | 3.8120 | .50087 | 50 |
| | Grandp. | 3.6240 | .54081 | 50 |
| | Total | 3.7180 | .52712 | 100 |
| Total | Parent | 3.7680 | .48925 | 100 |
| | Grandp. | 3.6010 | .53191 | 100 |
| | Total | 3.6845 | .51657 | 200 |

The perception of time

To verify the hypothesis that there is relation between the future time perception in the relationship and age we calculated the Pearson r correlation coefficient. The data indicate the existence of a moderate negative correlation ($r = -.557$, $p = .000$). The more the people advance through age, the more the future of the relationship with the child / grandchild is perceived as limited.

To verify the hypothesis according to which there is link between the future time perception in the relation ($M = 5.335$, $SD = 1.331$) and the behavioral evaluation of children / grandchildren ($M = 3.684$, $SD = .5165$), we calculated Pearson r correlation coefficient. According to the data there is a weak positive relationship between the future time perception in the relationship and the behavioral evaluation of children / grandchildren ($r = 0.166$, $p = .019$). However, people who perceive the future with their children / grandchildren as open tend to positively evaluate their behavior, and those who perceive the future with their children / grandchildren relationships as limited will tend to evaluate their behavior with less positive elements.

Discussion

Based on the many aspects that distinguish elders and younger adults in terms of how they relate to others and how they evaluate various social issues has been hypothesized that differences will also arise regarding the parent / child relationships for younger adults, and grandparent / grandchild relationships for elderly people. The results indicate that there are differences regarding the assessment of the behavior of minors by adults according to adult status: grandparent or parent. These results are consistent with many researches which reveal differences in the way the behavior of others is perceived and evaluated in old age compared to younger adults (Fingerman, 1995; Winkeler et al., 2000; Lefkowitz & Fingerman, 2003). According to Luong et al. (2011), the differences between ages in terms of social issues and evaluation of the others are related to the tendency of elderly people to focus on and promote positive experiences. Generally, the elders compared to the young adults focus on the positive aspects around them (Kennedy et al., 2004; Mather, & Carstensen, 2005; Mather, 2006; Nikitin & Freund, 2011; Isaacowitz, 2012; Isaacowitz & Blanchard-Fields, 2012; Mather, 2012).

In this study we started from the premise that there will be differences in the evaluation of children / grandchildren behavior by gender of the evaluator due to the fact that women are experts in evaluating social aspects and for this reason they may be perceived as more demanding (Turliuc, 2004). Yet, the results show contrary: there is no difference in the evaluation of children/grandchildren's behavior by gender of the evaluator.

The results of this study revealed that people who perceive the future time of the relationship with their own child / grandchild as open tend to positively evaluate their behavior, and those who see the future of the relationship with their own child / grandchild as limited tend to evaluate their behavior with fewer positive elements. These findings contradict the studies showing that people who face limitations of time focus more on emotional goals facilitating to achieve gratification and satisfaction in the relationships with others (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1998; Fung, Carstensen, & Lutz

1999; Fung & Carstensen, 2006). This conclusion is contrary to the socioemotional selectivity theory which asserts that the time limitation is associated with the *positivity effect*. The *positivity effect* consists in the focus on the positive aspects (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). This study has also shown that people tend to perceive the future time of the relationship as limited as they get older. This conclusion is accordance with the socioemotional selectivity theory which asserts that the perception of future time limitation is central to the more advanced ages compared to other ages (Carstensen, 1993; Carstensen & Charles, 1998).

Some limitations of the present study need to be considered when interpreting the findings, mainly from the sample composition. However, the results of this study may be seen as additional insight in multigenerational relationships of the family. Further explanations need to be addressed in future research, in order to bring depth understandings of these results.

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