

THE ROLE OF RETIREMENT, FAMILY RELATIONS AND HEALTH IN EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES OF 60–75 YEAR OLDS

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INTRODUCTION

Social and demographic problems related to an aging population have been in the focus of attention all over the world for the past few decades. The ratio of old people in the world was 8% in 1950, 10% in 2000, however, by 2050, according to a UN study (UN 2000), more than one fifth of mankind, and about 36–37% of the population in Europe will be over the age of 60. We can expect that this will have a significant economic impact on economic development, on the labour market and on generation transfers. Furthermore, we must be aware of other social implications as well, such as family composition, forms of partnership, or even the health care system, public life and political behaviour (e.g.: the outcome of elections) will not be left unchanged. Thus we can say that the continuous growth of the elderly age groups and their larger ratio will have a direct impact on generation co-operation, which is a determining and basic factor in the functioning of society.

The general aging process common to the whole of Europe is typical for Hungary as well. In a population of about 10 million, the ratio of the age group of 14 and under has been dropping continuously and in the last few years at a faster rate, while that of the older active age groups increased, and that of the over 60 age group even more. These ratios result from fertility and mortality trends, while international migration has not played a determining role in Hungary, at least so far. 50 years ago, however, the proportion of the youngest and oldest age groups has changed significantly, the so called aging index (the ratio of the age groups of 65 and over to 14 and under) has grown significantly.

Table 1
Age composition of the population (male and female together, 1 January) and the aging index in Hungary (1949–2001) (%)

Age group (years)	1949	1960	1970	1980	1990	2001
0–14	24.9	25.4	21.1	21.9	20.5	16.6
15–39	38.8	36.8	37.0	35.8	35.5	35.1
40–59	24.7	24.1	24.8	25.3	25.0	28.0
60–X	11.7	13.8	17.0	17.1	18.9	20.3
<i>Within this:</i>						
60–64	4.1	4.8	5.6	3.6	5.6	5.2
65–X	7.6	9.0	11.4	13.5	13.3	15.1
Aging index	30.3	35.2	54.4	61.9	64.5	91.3

Source: Demographic Yearbook. Budapest: KSH

Though demographic aging and the deterioration of the age structure (with their attendant social effects) including all the striking social impacts, indicate a negative process, the growth in life span is a very positive phenomenon. This is especially true in countries – Hungary being one of them, unfortunately – where the average life expectancy at birth is low. In Hungary it is hardly over 70 and in case of men it remains under 70. Hungarian men who have already celebrated their 60th birthday can expect only just a little more than 15 years more in life, while women of the same age can expect 20. Life expectancy at birth has increased only very moderately in the past 20 years (for men, by 0.71 years between 1980–2000, for women, by 1.72) due to the very bad mortality rate. Nevertheless, the number of people 60 and over has fortunately increased by some 600 thousand in the last 20 years since 1980.

Social solidarity demands that younger generations pay increased attention to the living conditions and quality of life of the one fifth of the population slowly out of work, or becoming inactive. One of the most important elements of care is to prolong economic activities – work – on the one hand and on the other hand, to provide proper pensions and to sustain their value. Hungary, together with the rest of the former socialist countries, or with the countries preparing to accede to the European Union, is in a special situation in this regard. It is known that the employment rate of the 15–64 year olds is well under that of the EU Member States. This is partially due to ‘traditions’: for decades, women in Hungary retired at the age of 55, men at 60. Retirement age increased gradually only from the middle of the 90’s (amongst legislation providing certain allowances and stipulating other stringent measures) – to 62, the retirement age currently in force. Another reason is the development of large-

scale unemployment product of the economic and social changes in 1989/90. According to the findings of the Labour Force Surveys unemployed people over 50 hardly ever sought work. Making use of the different possibilities of retirement (such as early retirement with age allowance, requesting disability status) and having met the required number of years spent in work, masses of them simply left the labour market, which did not offer them much anyway. As a result, the total number of inactive people receiving one of several types of pensions is significantly higher than the number of people being 60 and over (above 3 million.) Although within this group old age pensioners prevail receiving a pension which they are entitled to on the basis of the number of years spent in work (some 65%), even they may be comprised of people under the age of 60. The lifestyle of pensioners who have already retired but are still of working age resembles in a lot of aspects those of the 'elderly pensioners' than of the active members of their own age group because their possibilities – reduced financial means and social contacts – restrict them. Thus the double task of social action is made up of managing problems arising from biological aging, and also of easing the everyday financial and psychological problems of being a pensioner.

Social statistics provide us with different cross sectional and macro-statistical data on family relations and the housing conditions of the elderly and of the retired (the most complete ones are, of course, the census data), on income and consumption (continuous surveys on household budgets) and on lifestyles and health (periodically prepared national time budget and health surveys.) Cross sectional macro-statistics of different statistical offices, among them the Central Statistical Office of Hungary, which comply with EUROSTAT, ILO, WHO and other international statistical standards and recommendations, are available and abundant; they are easily accessible and make international and time series comparison possible.

Surprisingly, we have less information on the aging process as such in spite of the fact that it is important not only to describe the situation, but also to see how a dramatic change in status takes place in the life of the individual: retirement. Is it really true that aging goes hand-in-hand with the narrowing of one's scope for life and action, and if yes do the resulting disadvantages grow with age, or, having once reached old age, do people simply 'resign' themselves to their situations and feel less exclusion and loss of status? What impact do growing older and the deterioration of one's health have on the structure of activities of the elderly and on their well-being? In which period of one's life do difficult life situations develop most frequently which the elderly cannot solve by themselves, not even with the help of their families? No adequate answer can be given to these questions relying only on descriptive statistics; the answers are to be found in other data obtained with different approaches.

The Demographic Research Institute of the Central Statistical Office has recently launched a series of research projects using the panel method with the aim of providing an adequate data system to explain changes in demographic behaviour (Spéder 2002). The data system to be set up will bring major turning points of life courses and structural relations (e.g.: education, profession) into a single unified system, including the values and attitudes which are shaped by structural relations and which in turn have an impact on behaviour. During the first wave of panel data collection at the turn of 2001/2002, a national representative sample of 18–75 year old men and women were interviewed (altogether 16.363 people.)¹ This sample covering almost 60 birth years makes it possible to continuously monitor possible demographic events (such as partnerships, marriage formation, childbearing, divorces, grown children leaving home, becoming widows/widowers) for different generations now and in the future. Since some 20% of the total sample is in the age group of 60–75, a possibility to study the most important social and economic parameters of people living in ‘the age of aging’, but not yet considered officially old has opened up.

The most typical differences within the aging age group can be studied after the first wave of data collection. There are three typical features we discuss in the present study which go through significant changes during the time of aging, that is, between the years of 60–75. The first one is the significant transformation in economic activities and incomes within this age group. Special family relations of the 60–75 year olds make up the second characteristics, which are also significantly transformed in this period covering 15 years. The third one is health, which deteriorates spectacularly, as we will see later on. We will show that everyday tasks and activities which keep this age group busy also change considerably along these three parameters. Naturally a number of individual circumstances might play a role in the period of aging, such as life-courses, place of residence, economic activity, cultural level, the network of connections. As a result, aging can occur or become apparent earlier or later in life, depending on the individual. The interpretation and analysis of the individual process of aging will become possible only after the second wave of the panel study.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND INCOMES AT THE AGE OF 60–75

As has already been mentioned for a long time the Hungarian pension system made retirement possible at a relatively young age – as we see today. This significant change in status took place by the age of 56 in the lives of 85% of

¹ For the description of the concept of the Hungarian research, see Spéder 2002. The panel survey ‘Turning points of our life course’ was supported by NKFP, Budapest No. 5/128/2001.

retired woman of 75 and under studied at the turn of 2001/2002, and by the age of 60 in 90% of the lives of men of the same group. Ever since the pension system was transformed, retirement age for both genders has been 62. However, legislation is being applied gradually, thus we can still find regular old age pensioners, entitled in their own right, who are not yet 60. For example, 5–6% of the men and 18% of the women in our sample for old age pensioners were under 60 in 2001–2002. At the same time, nearly 90% of the 60–75 year old age group received old age pension to which they were entitled to in their own right. Therefore our statements on the aging age group are also more or less valid for the old age pensioners who are 75 or younger.

The findings of the Labour Force Surveys tell us that only a very small percentage (less than 4% nationwide in 2001) of the people above retirement age was economically active. Our own studies show that this figure was 1.5% among the 60–75 year olds at the turn of 2001–2002. We can state that men and women reaching retirement age (annually some 100 thousand people nationwide) practically disappear from the labour market. Employers are not interested in elderly people at all (this is true not only for retired people, but also for those who are close to retirement age.) This is something to think about because demographic aging and the increase in the number of old people raise the question more and more: how can the older generation be motivated? One way could be to prolong and maintain economic activities for as long as possible. But today there are several obstacles to this. According to our findings, most of the older active people (employees of 46–60/62 years of age) expect to be sent to retirement at the age of 62. But they would rather retire earlier than that, as an average by about 4–5 years. Reasons include becoming free from obligations, fatigue, bad health, but we can also find arguments such as counting on some sort of a job while being retiring. They would be happier to accept jobs as ‘young pensioners’ (with a secured pension behind their backs) rather than to retain a prolonged active, but uncertain labour market status where the danger of losing the job is present. In reality, however, employers are hardly interested in people even between the ages of 45–50. Realistically, today only a small proportion of old age pensioners wish to take a job. The proportion of those doing some sort of (legal or illegal) income generating jobs is not very high either. 7% of old age pensioners under 75 do regular work, 4% of them work on and off. But statistics do not really indicate this, and there are few traces in the organised economy either. Only those with a degree have somewhat better prospects here. As against the 5–7% of those who have finished only the 8 grades of elementary education, nearly one third of old age pensioners who have a degree and are under the age of 75 were able to generate some extra income through regular on or and off work at the turn of 2001/2002.

Statistical data and analytical studies clearly show that in the couple of decades before the change of the system at the beginning of the 90’s, that is in the

70' and 80's, becoming a pensioner also meant drifting towards poverty. This situation changed or rather has been differentiated somewhat since the 90's. For example, the proportion of pensioners belonging to the lowest one fifth of the income scale dropped significantly in 1992–1998. This 'improvement' is, of course, relative. The drop in the standards of living was quite general in Hungary in the 90's, but the situation of the elderly as compared to that of the majority of society certainly deteriorated less in this particular period of time.

Our own studies support the fact that this statement was true also in 2001/2002: the proportion of 60–75 year olds in the lowest fifth of the income scale was better off than the average for the 18–75 year olds in our sample, and for the 18–59 year olds. Data also show that the elderly generation is more homogenous in its incomes than the younger ones; less of them belong to the extreme fifths of the income scale since most of them can be found in the middle income range. We can also see that the number of people in the lowest fifth of the income scale decreases by age. The opposite, however, cannot be said of the highest income fifth. As a matter of fact, there are less, not more 60–75 year olds among the affluent than young people. Furthermore, we can observe a quite large opening of the income gap in society as a whole there is a lot of polarisation, but this is less typical of the retired or aging generations.

Table 2

*Ratios of those in the lowest and in the highest fifths of the income scale in the age group of 18–75 year olds, based on the per capita income in a household (2001/2002) (%)**

Age group	Lowest income fifth	Highest income fifth
18–29 year olds	22.3	25.3
30–39 year olds	27.6	18.5
40–49 year olds	26.4	18.9
50–54 year olds	22.2	23.4
55–59 year olds	16.5	24.0
60–64 year olds	12.5	15.9
65–69 year olds	14.9	12.3
70–75 year olds	12.3	12.0
Altogether	21.6	20.0
N=	(3150)	(2914)

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

*The per capita income in a household served as basis for setting the income fifths taking the so called equivalent income into account. The flexibility factor used to calculate the equivalent income was 0.73, which is close to the scale set up by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

Some 11% of the total sample could not or would not answer questions on the income of their households.

For pensioners, the situation is a bit more complex. Pensioners form an extremely heterogeneous group regarding the amount of the pension. Old age pensions which the pensioner is entitled to his/her own right are much better than other forms of pension benefits (disability pension, widow's pension, and other forms of pension-like benefits.) It follows that old age pensioners are under-represented, while other pensioners are over-represented in the lowest fifth of the income scale (and both are under-represented in the highest fifth.)

Table 3

Ratio of people not receiving pensions, old age pensioners and other types of pensioners in the lowest and highest fifths of the income scale in the total sample of the age group of 18–75, based on the per capita income of the households (2001/2002) (%)

Pension received	Lowest income fifth	Highest income fifth
Not receiving pension	23.4	23.2
Old age pensioners	10.1	15.9
Disability pensioners	32.1	7.6
Other pensioners	31.4	9.6
Altogether	21.6	20.0
N=	(3150)	(2914)

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Besides seeing the position in the income structure, we also determined the ratio of poor people in the studied population. As it is well known, there is no consensus on the definition of poverty; there are several methods that can be used to calculate the poverty line. One of these sets out the concept of relative poverty, and considers a certain percentage (e.g.: 40, 50, 60%) of the median income as income poverty. In our definition relative poverty covers those who have less than one half of the per capita average equivalent income in a household. Accordingly, 11.6% of the population of 18–75 years of age could be considered relatively poor at the turn of 2001/2002.

Using the above definition, the ratio of the 60–75 year old age group among the poor is significantly lower: 7.5% of the 60–69 year olds and 6.3% of the 70–75 year olds could be said to be poor. There is a significant difference in the poverty rates of those receiving old age pensions and other pensions: 5.3% of those getting old age pensions, and nearly 20% of the disability pensioners have income under the poverty line.

Table 4
Ratio of the poor in the age group of 18–75 year olds by age group and by type of pension received (2001/2002) (%)

Age group	poor	Type of pension	poor
18–29	11.7	Not receiving pension	12.3
30–39	13.7	Old age pension	5.3
40–49	14.6	Disability pension	19.6
50–59	11.5	Other pension	17.4
60–69	7.5	Total:	11.6
70–75	6.3	N=	(16363)
Total	11.6		
N=	(16363)		

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Since the pensioner population is quite heterogeneous: we should look for the majority of the poor among the disability pensioners, among those living solely on widow's pension in single person households, and among those elderly who have no pension at all (or only some kind of pension-like benefit) and not among the old age pensioners. And in all probability the poorest of all are the old inmates of welfare homes, but we know nothing of their situation from our survey.

FAMILY RELATIONS

Besides the change in economic status and in the income conditions of the 60–75 year old age group, another major determining factor in their lives is the change in family relations. Most people live the last period of their family lives around this time, as a matter of fact this last stage of family life – children leaving the family home, death of the spouse – is already over for many. The distribution by family status indicates this very well: there are marked changes taking place from age group to age group in the different ratios, especially in the case of women – basically due to becoming a widow.

Table 5
Family status of the 60–75 year old respondents, by age group and by gender (2001/2002) (%)

Family status	Age group			Total
	60–64 year olds	65–69 year olds	70–75 year olds	
Men				
Unmarried	4.5	4.9	1.4	3.7
Married, living together	77.2	78.4	77.1	77.6
Married, separated	2.0	1.3	0.9	1.4
Widower	7.7	9.3	16.6	10.9
Divorced	8.6	6.1	4.0	6.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N=	(505)	(462)	(409)	(1376)
Women				
Unmarried	4.1	3.0	4.5	3.9
Married, living together	55.4	47.3	30.9	44.3
Married, separated	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8
Widow	30.1	38.3	55.9	41.7
Divorced	9.5	10.6	7.9	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N=	(682)	(624)	(703)	(2009)

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Today cohabitation as a life style is wide spread in Hungary, thus it is reasonable to take into account the relationships of couples not legally established. Some 8% of the total sample (of the 18–75 year olds) stated they were living in cohabitation at the time of data collection. This was higher among the younger ones (14% among the 20–29 year olds), while being considerably less frequent among the older generations: 5% of the 60–64 year olds and 2–3% of the 65–75 year olds lived in cohabitation in 2002.

When we discuss the variant describing the *types of familial cohabitation* below it is useful to take these two types of marriage type relationships together. In this stage of the life cycle this factor could be extremely important: it makes a difference if the aging person remains alone in a single person household, or lives together with someone with whom she/he has emotional ties, of whom she/he can take care, or who can offer support for her/him, with or without being legally married. This is the reason behind the somewhat higher figure of those living in partnerships than in marriage that we speak about when we refer to the variant determined for the different types of familial cohabitation. Another criterion for setting the variant was 'the number of people in the

household'. These two features (whether someone lives together with a partner, or if there is another person living in the household) are determined very much by the age of the elderly people studied. We could say that *marked and significant changes* take place in this (only) 15 year long period between the ages of 60 and 75, and these changes show different characteristics in the two genders. For women the ratio of single person households almost doubles within the above 15 years and the number of those living in partnerships drops at about the same rate mostly due to their becoming widows. In case of men, the situation is somewhat different. The number of single person households increases slightly closer to the age of 75, but compared to the 60–64 year olds, the number of those living in two-person households and partnerships, quite large in number, increases by 10 percentage points. The reason for this is that wives are usually younger, thus men are less likely to become widowers. On the other hand, we may conclude from the fact that the ratio of 70–75 year old men (as compared to 60–64 year olds) increases in spite of the drop in the number of the age group that men living in marriages can probably *expect to live longer* than those who live without a partnership.

Table 6
Types of family forms among the 60–75 year old respondents by age group and by gender (2001/2002) (%)

Types of family forms	Age group			total
	60–64 year olds	65–69 year olds	70–75 year olds	
Men				
Living in a single person household	10.2	11.6	16.9	12.6
Living without partnership in two or more person household	6.5	5.7	3.8	5.4
Living in a partnership in a two person household	52.0	60.1	62.1	57.7
Living in a partnership in three or more person household	31.3	22.6	17.2	24.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N=	(504)	(462)	(407)	(1373)
Women				
Living in a single person household	25.9	33.9	47.4	35.9
Living without partnership in a two or more person household	14.3	16.2	20.7	17.1
Living in a partnership in two person household	42.4	39.2	27.3	36.1
Living in a partnership in three or more person household	17.4	10.7	4.7	10.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N=	(682)	(623)	(702)	(2007)

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Generation relationships (own children, grandchildren) dominate in multi-person households of the ‘aging generation’ and only a small fraction of these ‘multi-person households’ are made up of other relatives or other persons.

Table 7
Presence of children, grandchildren in the homes of the 60–75 year olds by age group and by gender (2001/2002) (%)

In the household:	Age group			Total
	60–64 year olds	65–69 year olds	70–75 year olds	
Men (100%=1373)				
No own child	67.7	75.4	80.6	74.1
Own child	28.1	17.4	11.6	19.6
(within this, grandchild also):	4.2	7.2	7.8	6.3
Total	36.7	33.6	29.7	100.0
Women (100%=2007)				
No own child	73.9	76.6	77.5	76.0
Own child	16.3	13.4	11.8	13.8
(within this, grandchild also):	9.8	10.1	10.7	10.2
Total	34.0	31.0	35.0	100.0

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

The range of 60–75 year old men and women *living together with children/grandchildren* understandably narrows down with age: children grow up and leave the family home to set up their own. This means that for elderly people their family life cycle is coming to an end. Data indicates that in case of men this process may take a bit longer. We see the reason for this in the different marrying and childbearing practices of men and women. The majority of women of 60–65 married by the age of 24 (more than 80%), 40% of men of the same age married between 25–29, and another 9–10% of them only after they were 30. Because they married earlier, 60–75 year old women had their first babies at the average age of 24.83, while men of the same age had their first children at 27.25. Thus the children of the women in the study were older in 2002, and had thus left the family home earlier. (Just to note: the difference in the timing of childbearing in the lives of the two genders evens out in the final analysis. The average number of children born during the lifetimes of the 60–75 year olds differs only slightly between men and women; they vary from 1.7–1.8 in the different age groups.)

Due to the fact that as compared to men women have children earlier in life, in case of those living together with (older) children, more of them live together with grandchildren (as well), while in case of men with children – especially in the ‘youngest’ group of 60–64 – it is not rare to see family forms of living together with children who still need supporting (e.g.: students.)

Internal *age composition* of households is a determining factor. Studying the process of approaching old age, the ‘age of aging’ it might be important to investigate whether the elderly have a chance to interact with the *younger generations* and to what extent the younger ones involve them in their own everyday lives, share their problems with them.

Those living in households can be grouped roughly into the three usual categories:

- 0–29 year olds are considered to be *young*,
- 30–59 year olds are *middle aged*,
- 60 and over are *old*;

If we take these categories then we could say that only one third (33%) of the ‘elderly generation’, of the 60–75 year olds, can share their everyday lives with those belonging to the middle aged and young generations. About 30% of the 60–75 year olds live in single person households, 40% of them have only old people in their households. We do not know much about people over 75 because our sample did not cover them. Nevertheless, it appears that while only 5% of the total sample (18–75 year olds) live in households with at least one member over 75 years of age, in households of the 60–75 this ratio is almost double (9,4%).

It is partially related to the age composition of households that 76% of men and 81% of women of the age group of 60–75 live in households with *no active, income-earning member* in it. This also changes dynamically with age: the relatively better situation of men of 60–64 (provided most probably by the spouse who has not yet retired) is evened out between the two genders by the time they are 65 and over:

Table 8
The ratio of households with no active, income-earning members for 60–75 year old men and women (2001/2002) (%)

No active, income earning member in the household:	At 60–64 years of age	At 65–69 years of age	At 70–75 years of age	Total
Among men	57,0	75,5	79,2	69,8
Among women	71,0	77,8	83,5	77,5

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

Having studied the relationship between income and family forms it seems that living in a partnership (but only in a two person household) provides the best income situation for the old age pensioners. The benefit of ‘two incomes, one set of overheads’ is the reason for this. Yet even the single person households of old age pensioners are under the 10.1% average in the lowest income fifth. However, in case of those pensioners who live without a partnership but together with family members have greater chances of falling into the lowest income category. This is especially true for households where not only pensioners live, but also minors to be supported (grandchildren); the ratio of these pensioners in the lowest income fifth is clearly very high.

Table 9
Ratio of old age pensioners in the lowest and highest income fifths by types of family forms (2001/2002) (%)

Types of family forms	Lowest	Highest
	Income fifth	
Living in a single person household	7.8	13.9
Living without a partner in a multi person households	21.8	10.8
Living in a partnership in a two person household	6.0	17.5
Living in a partnership in a three or more person household	16.3	17.5
Household including supported children	24.6	15.6
Household not including a supported child	8.6	15.9
Total	10.1	15.9

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

The phenomenon that the relatively low rate of poor among the old age pensioners goes up to almost double among those who have lost their partners but still live in multi person households fits very well into this:

Table 10
Ratio of the poor among old age pensioners by family forms (2001/2002) (%)

Type of family forms	Ratio of the poor
Living alone in a single person household	3.1
Living without a partner in a multi person household	12.9
Living in a partnership in a two person household	4.1
Living in a partnership in three or more person household	6.5
Total	5.3

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

Having seen all this perhaps it is not surprising that old age pensioners under 75 retiring with relatively good pensions, sometimes even taking an income generating job, try to keep their independence as long as possible, even to the very end. Living together with younger generations, with children and grandchildren, is actually a necessity. Only families who are in great need will choose this option. Or perhaps the young ones need the income (pension) of the elderly, or may be the elderly person needs the support of the young. If this observation is true it would probably be necessary to study more in detail all the values, benefits and disadvantages of living together.

HEALTH

There is consensus in international and Hungarian literature that the most complete source of information on the health of the population is probably the subjective reports: to what extent do they feel healthy/unhealthy, is there any health problem in their lives which hinders them in their daily activities, how often do they visit the doctor, do they take any medication, etc. A great advantage of this representative data collection is that it also covers those who do not go to healthcare institutions or to doctors. Thus the topics and methods of inquiring about health are well developed, including the age specific methods, the detailed interviewing techniques focusing on certain diseases, lifestyles, mental and physical fitness and the feeling of well-being in general.

We used only a few of these elements in our survey, namely:

- Do health problems hinder 18–75 year old men and women in their everyday activities?
- Do they take any prescribed medication (implying some chronic diseases),?
- In general, to what extent are they satisfied with their health?

One third of the adult population reported to have *health problems hindering them in their daily activities*. As expected, this complaint increased with age.

Table 11
Frequency of health problems hindering daily activities in the lives of 18–75 year olds by age group and by gender (2001/2002) (%)

Age group (year)	‘To what extent does this health problem/disease hinder you?’					Total
	Severely	Slightly	Varies	Does not hinder	Does not know	
Men						
18–29	1.2	4.9	1.9	92.0	0.1	100.0
30–39	2.8	8.4	4.0	84.7	0.1	100.0
40–49	7.6	13.5	7.3	71.6	0.1	100.0
50–59	14.8	18.6	13.6	53.0		100.0
60–69	17.8	22.2	11.6	48.4		100.0
70–75	19.7	27.2	11.4	41.7		100.0
Together	8.2	13.0	7.1	71.7	0.0	100.0
N=	(633)	(1005)	(550)	(5554)	(3)	(7745)
Women						
18–29	1.2	4.0	2.6	92.2		100.0
30–39	2.5	6.8	5.0	85.6	0.1	100.0
40–49	5.7	14.3	12.2	67.8	0.1	100.0
50–59	11.9	19.9	15.6	52.6		100.0
60–69	18.1	25.4	15.6	40.9		100.0
70–75	27.0	28.3	16.2	28.4	0.1	100.0
Together	8.9	14.5	10.3	66.3	0.0	100.0
N=	(766)	(1253)	(885)	(5710)	(3)	(8617)

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

As it is evident from the above, the ‘*turning point*’ both for men and for women in the life course is around 50–60: over the age of 60 the majority feel hindered in their daily activities by some health problem. Among the 70–75 year olds, a notable *difference occurs between men and women*: 42% of men, while only 28% of women feel fit enough to carry on with their everyday chores. The worse mortality of men is a possible explanation: those who are still alive are fitter. As for women, we are aware from other surveys that they visit their doctors much more often, thus their health-consciousness is more developed than that of men. Finally let us not forget that a significant proportion of old women live alone in single person households, thus their daily activities are more varied (they have to take care of themselves and of the home) and more tiring than those of elderly men living mostly with younger family

members. Old women who remain alone move in to live together with members of the family less often than old men who are alone. Thus it is quite understandable that some bigger chores are more tiring for the not completely healthy elderly women than for men of the same age.

The habits of taking medication regularly also coincide with the above. 29% of the 18–75 year old men regularly take some medication prescribed by a doctor, and the same is true for 41% of the women. Regular medication consumption increases dynamically with age: covering the majority of the oldest group (71% of men, 85% of women) do it. These shockingly high figures do not include over-the-counter medication (e.g.: sleeping pills, tranquillisers, pain killers) which are taken quite regularly by a lot of people as far as we know.

Table 12
*Ratio of regular medicine takers among the 18–75 year olds
by age group and by gender and among old age pensioners (2001/2002) (%)*

Age group	Regular medication consumers	
	Men	Women
18–29	6.2	9.7
30–39	12.3	16.4
40–49	26.3	36.2
50–59	50.3	62.0
60–69	63.6	76.7
70–75	71.9	84.8
Total	29.7	41.7
N=	(2293)	(3581)
Old age pensioners	64.5	75.1
N=	(805)	(1522)

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

In general, 18–75 year olds consider their health as slightly better than average: measuring it on an 11 point scale, it came to 7.04. However, the grade point averages dropped by more than 3 points from the youngest to the oldest age groups (18–29 year olds: 8.57 points, 70–75 year olds: 5.19). Women of all age groups consider their health worse than men. Understandably, the worse values were found among the disability pensioners, who reached only grade 4 on the 11 point scale.

Table 13
*The average grade points given to health among the 18–75 year olds
 by age group and among the old age pensioners
 (2001/2002) (0=worse, 10=best)*

Age group (years)	Men	Women
18–29	8.67	8.45
30–39	7.86	7.77
40–49	6.96	6.68
50–59	6.01	5.92
60–69	5.89	5.52
70–75	5.56	4.94
Total	7.21	6.81
Old age pensioners	5.92	5.64

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

With the extension of the life span, more and more people reach an age when they cannot or can barely take care of themselves. As we have already seen, self-sufficiency is not without problems for nearly 60% of men and more than 70% of women at the age of 70–75. The ideas aging people might have of their own later lives are not only their own personal problems, but they raise the issue of the responsibility of the immediate family surrounding them and of society at large. It is necessary for society to prepare adequately for caring for the elderly, being aware of the need of the affected persons. This problem is becoming more and more pressing with the increase in the ratio of the old. Naturally it would be very desirable for the quality of life of the aging people not to deteriorate significantly in this downward period of their lives. In principle there are a number of ways to care for them, but it is a different issue that practical implementation requires a lot of investment from the families as well as from society.

The most considerate one of all the possibilities is if the elderly people are *not forced to leave their usual surroundings, personal objects and whatever they consider as their valuables*. This requires regular visits and care from the family members of the elderly. Another solution is to *move to live together* with a suitable younger member of the family (or with some other person, a relative, a friend). Finally we can mention here the concept of the *institutional household*, the advantages of which are round the clock supervision, professional care and to some extent maintenance of social contacts for the old people. Today there is a lot of interest in this. Some time ago crowded, bad quality welfare homes and old people's homes maintained by the state, local government or the church were maintained, but ever since the change of the socio-political system

market based alternatives have been developing more and more (though still not enough). True, they require a lot of financial investment, but advantage is that such an alternative imitate an 'own home' environment (e.g.: one's own quarters, room, or even own furniture, the use of one's own personal objects, etc.), that is, they can cater for personal wishes while providing constant supervision and professional care.

Preparations of society to care for the ever increasing number of elderly should be made while taking into account *whatever the affected people prefer and accept the most*. We extended our study to cover this, too.

The majority of the adult population – young and old alike – think that the *best solution for the care of old people who have difficulty caring for themselves is if they need not leave their own homes*. However, there is a considerable interest in institutions as well (16%). The least preferred form of care is 'moving in together' with someone (either the elderly moves to his/her children, or takes them into his/her own home); those choosing this form remain under 10% in the entire sample. This is understandable. It is difficult for an elderly person to feel a burden on a relative or on a child, and an adult child moving in or taking in the elderly may find it hard not to make it felt that he/she is making a sacrifice by changing his/her lifestyle.

If we look at the opinion of the retired population from the family life aspect we can see that interest towards homes providing professional care is the highest among pensioners living in *single person households*; more than one fifth of them would choose this, thinking of times when they can no longer take care of themselves.

Table 14
Choices of old age pensioners among the alternatives for the period of degradation, by types of family forms (2001/2002) (%)

Family forms	Would prefer to live in institution or home providing professional care	Would prefer to remain in his/her own home	Would prefer to move in together with family member or another person	Other solution	Does not know	Total
Old age pensioners						
Living alone in a single person household	20.6	59.8	12.4	1.3	5.9	100.0
Living without a partner in a multi person household	13.7	66.4	13.2	0.8	5.9	100.0
Living in a partnership in a two person household	14.6	71.3	8.8	1.9	3.4	100.0
Living in a partnership in three or more person household	15.2	72.1	6.6	1.6	4.6	100.0
Total:	16.1	68.0	9.8	1.5	4.5	100.0
<i>Total sample of 18–75 year olds:</i>	<i>15.7</i>	<i>65.4</i>	<i>9.4</i>	<i>1.8</i>	<i>7.7</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

In reality, the range of those living in single person households is actually significantly higher than those covered by our analysis: a significant proportion of them are over 75 or surviving on a widow's pension. Thus the demand for institutions providing professional care is probably higher than our study can predict. This too, is a reason for special preparations for this part of ones life – preparation on the part of individuals, families and society. As for the preparation of individuals and families, adequate savings are needed so that this type of care can be provided to the elderly with the least possible drop in their living standards. But attitudes must also change if we want to achieve this. Quite often when younger members of the family come across the degradation of their elderly family members, they have difficulties in finding a quick and good solution. Yet – according to our survey– more than half of the 18–75 year old, including the 'aging generation', do not tackle the problem of creating financial security for old age. As for the preparations by society, we need a wider scale

of differentiated support for the establishment and maintenance of homes as well as for the incentives of market participants (e.g.: by tax allowances).

Still, the most preferred solution for those who cannot, or can only barely take care of themselves is to be able to remain at home. Their care will increasingly become an institutional task because the younger, working members of the family, no matter how responsible they feel, can only provide very limited care. Taking care of the elderly by NGOs (regular visits, meals, physical care, walking, etc.) is one of the possible ways to solve this issue. Should society support them, this can even create jobs for a number of people. This could also help in keeping unemployed women or younger pensioners in work, diverting their activities into the legal labour market which is controlled and taxable.

THE ROLE OF REGULAR TASKS IN THE LIFESTYLE OF PENSIONERS

Below we will focus on the extent to which 60–75 year old men and women and pensioners of the same age spend their days actively and to what extent this is influenced by their family and health conditions.

Time budget surveys give us the most complete picture on the lifestyles of the 60–75 year old aging generation, or of the pensioners. We are lucky in that the Central Statistical Office prepared a national time budget survey just a year before our data collection, in 1999/2000. Thanks to this we have detailed information on how elderly people spend their days round the clock. Analyses are based on the so called time budget observations (logs), which make it possible to determine

- The daily schedule (in minutes), the structure of activities,
- The percentage of those doing a certain activity, and
- The average time consumption (in minutes) of those who actually carry out the particular activity on an average day.

Since time budget logs are prepared – through the timing of observation – seven days a week (including holidays and week-ends) and throughout the four seasons, analyses give us information not only on the activity structure of week-days and holidays, but also on the seasonality of the activities (*Harcsa and Sebök 2002*).

The table below offers us an example of this: time spent on the major types of activities (average minutes) in the aging generation (and a comparison to the entire sample population of 15–74), for men and women separately, on an average day of the year.

Table 15
Time spent on different activities in the total sample of the 15–74 year old population and among the 60–74 year olds by gender (2001/2002) (on an average day of the year, in minutes)

Activities	Total sample of the 15–74 year olds			60–74 year olds		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Earning, productive activities	262	171	215	155	82	112
Full time job	189	127	157	28	8	16
Activities providing some extra income	7	3	5	4	2	3
Non-paid work done for others	14	11	12	15	14	14
Work done in own economic unit	51	30	40	108	58	78
Housekeeping: family provisions	94	240	170	87	272	200
Housework	49	184	119	76	225	164
Repair, maintenance	16	2	9	14	2	7
Shopping, use of services	17	26	22	23	27	25
Caring for children	12	28	20	4	4	4
Leisure activities	304	257	280	365	324	341
Leisure time spent in company of other people	59	43	51	53	42	48
Reading	27	21	24	43	28	35
TV, video	167	155	161	216	210	212
Physical relaxation	24	15	19	18	7	12
Hobbies	12	10	11	13	18	16

Source: Harcsa and Sebök 2002.

We tried to use another type of approach in the study of the lifestyle of the aging generation. Our starting position was that even though pensioners well deserve some rest and getting rid of the strict obligations required by a job, they might nevertheless miss regularly repeated ‘tasks’ from their lives, since these provide plans for them and make them feel useful. We feel it is important to be engaged in regular activities until the very end of one’s life in order to be able to preserve physical and mental fitness – activities which they feel obliged to do which bring some sort of positive monotony, some permanence into their lives giving a rhythm to their days.

We have chosen eight typical activities which are due to their nature suitable to offer as day by day tasks, obligations. These are the following:

1. Housekeeping (cooking, laundry, housework, shopping).
2. Agricultural work, tending the garden and animals.
3. Keeping pet animals, caring for them (e.g.: cat, dog, fish, etc).
4. Domestic work, repairs, maintenance.
5. Caring for/supervising children, grandchildren.
6. Helping in children's household and farm.
7. Caring for the ill, taking care of another person.
8. Public activities, voluntary work (in NGO's, in church, in a political party, in local government).

It is worthwhile noting, that the range of possible daily activities could be a whole lot wider. Such could be for instance taking a job for a shorter or longer period of time, becoming informed (reading newspapers, watching TV), meeting people, talking to others, exchanging ideas, a variety of hobbies, acquiring more education (reading, studying, using the Internet), and we could go on and on. But these – perhaps with the sole exception of having a job – are more for individual interest, inclination or hobby, rather than an obligation that might be due to one's living conditions (for example: agricultural work, tending animals), or due to a task assumed within the family (baby sitting for grandchildren, caring for ill people) all of which give daily rhythm to a person's life.

Our question – which of the listed activities do they do regularly on a daily basis – was put only to the 60–75 year old pensioners. Future waves of the panel survey will show how 'obligation' of activities narrow down and in what aspects after this period in life.

Aging people are not equally affected in different activities. For example agricultural work or tending animals do not affect 15% of them – in the capital city of Budapest this is 40% – and about one fifth of the studied population is no longer involved in caring for children and grandchildren. Thus the amount and order of importance of regularly performed activities are shown in two ways:

- Taking the entire sample of the 60–75 year olds into account, reflecting the ratio of those doing the given activity within the age group, and
- Only among those 60–75 year olds in whose immediate environments the given activity could possibly be a task.

The two kinds of grouping are possible due to the separate handling of the answers by ticking 'my task', 'not my task', 'not affected'.

Table 16
Ratios of tasks regularly carried out by 60–75 year old pensioners as a percentage of the total sample and as that of the total number of affected persons (2001/2002) (%)

Tasks	As a percentage of all the 60–75 year old pensioners	As a percentage of all those 'affected' in doing the task	Ratio of those 'not affected'
1. Housekeeping	70.0	71.2	1.2
2. Agricultural work, tending the garden and animals	51.5	63.5	14.7
3. Keeping pets, caring for them	50.0	65.4	17.7
4. Household work, repair, maintenance	45.0	50.2	5.4
5. Caring for and supervising children, grandchildren	28.4	37.7	20.7
6. Helping in children's households and farms	24.3	31.7	23.3
7. Caring for the ill, caring for another person	12.5	17.8	26.7
8. Public activities	7.0	10.6	36.4

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Housekeeping, repairs and maintenance are areas affecting practically all elderly people. We can also see that the first four places in the list are taken by activities which provide a daily task for the majority of the age group. The ratio of those who, no longer care for children and grandchildren (any more) increases significantly. However, more than one third of the affected group still participate intensively in supervising grandchildren (and to a lesser extent they have some obligations on their children's households or farm.) With age they are gradually left out of this work.

Only some 7% of 60–75 year old people participate in the work of NGO's, churches, political parties and local governments, which is not too high. (We must note here, however, that it is difficult to interpret the difference between the categories of 'affected, but does not do the task' and 'not affected', still, this is where most responders did not feel affected.)

The social–demographic characteristics of those carrying out certain tasks are shown with reference to those who have a realistic possibility to do the task, that is, they are affected.

Just as we were expecting, really significant differences were seen along the two major demographic characteristics, that is, gender and age (age group). Housekeeping is still typically 'woman's work'; household chores, repairs and

maintenance are typically 'men's jobs'. This does not mean that should there be need, elderly men and women refuse to do the 'atypical' tasks. Obligations of the two genders are getting closer nowadays especially in agricultural work, gardening and tending animals, though men perform more of these tasks than women. This is so partially because there is a lot of physically heavier activity involved and partially because women's time is taken up by housekeeping activities. (This is supported by Table 13 data: 60–75 year old women spend three times as much time keeping house than men of the same age.) Furthermore, women spend more time caring for grandchildren, for the ill, or caring for another person, while more men spend more time in public activities, though not much more.

With age, involvement in tasks in almost all areas gets reduced regarding genders. This can be felt even in housekeeping, but only in case of women. It is as though from the age of 70, fewer men are capable of doing heavy physical tasks in agriculture, in repairs and maintenance, therefore they get/find tasks for themselves among the different housekeeping activities.

The most striking from a demographic aspect is the reduction of activities around children and grandchildren: there is a sudden drop even (and especially among women) in this activity after they reach 70. By this time grandchildren do not need special supervision, and aging parents and grandparents cannot be burdened any more by helping in the children's homes or farms. The same is true for caring for the ill or for anyone else: families leave this work to relatives over 70 only as a last resort.

Table 17
Ratios of 60–75 year old pensioners doing regular tasks by gender and by age group (2001/2002) (as a % of those affected)

Age group (years)	House-keeping	Agricultural work, tending garden or animals	Keeping pets	Repair, maintenance	Supervising children	Helping in children's homes and farms	Caring for the ill or for other persons	Public activities
Men (N=1283)								
60–64	35.9	80.6	73.3	89.4	37.3	35.2	15.1	15.2
65–69	35.4	70.4	63.3	81.9	31.6	33.1	12.3	11.7
70–75	36.9	70.9	67.0	76.5	28.4	27.0	14.8	12.9
Total	36.0	74.2	67.9	83.0	32.6	32.2	14.1	13.3
Women (N=1885)								
60–64	97.2	56.3	65.4	23.0	52.1	38.2	25.1	10.0
65–69	95.3	56.4	62.0	26.5	41.9	32.5	22.2	10.0
70–75	93.1	53.7	59.3	24.4	28.6	23.3	13.7	5.9
Total	95.2	55.5	62.3	24.6	41.2	31.5	20.3	8.6
Together (N=3171)								
60–64	72.0	66.9	68.8	51.5	46.1	37.0	21.1	12.2
65–69	69.8	62.7	62.6	52.1	37.5	32.7	18.0	10.8
70–74	72.0	60.6	62.3	45.7	28.5	25.1	14.1	8.8
Total	71.2	63.5	65.4	50.2	37.7	31.7	17.8	10.6

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Everyday tasks and obligations depend on the composition of the family elderly people live in. Those living in single person households are mainly the ones whose time is taken up almost fully by housekeeping – who could do the job for them, anyway? The ratio of those without a partner is also high, 80%, and the same is true for those pensioners who live in larger families, but do housekeeping tasks. This is so because women dominate the single person households as well as in numbers of those living with families but without a partner. Those living in partnerships are less tied by housekeeping even if they live just the two of them together or with more people; they also perform more activities than those living without a partner. This is also partially due to 'gender' as a variable in the background: 'men's jobs' are more present among those who live in partnerships. Anyway, partnerships create a sharing of tasks and obligations among the elderly, while also providing a more active, eventful activity structure for them.

Childcare and the supervision of grandchildren are more frequent than average among those – with or without a partnership – who live in larger families. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a quite large percentage of pensioners living in single person households participate in family tasks: some 30% of them spend day after day taking care of grandchildren, 25–26% help in the children's households or farms, and some of them (6%) care for the ill or for another person.

Table 18
Ratios of 60–75 year old pensioners doing regular tasks by types of family forms (2001/2002) (as a % of those affected)

Tasks	Living in a single person household	Living without a partner in a multi person household	Living in partnership in a two person household	Living in a partnership in a three or more person household	Total
Housekeeping	96.7	83.7	60.3	51.2	71.2
Agricultural work, tending the garden and animals	60.7	55.1	65.9	69.1	63.5
Keeping pets, caring for them	65.3	64.0	63.1	70.5	65.4
Housework, repair, maintenance	44.2	31.0	55.2	59.4	50.2
Caring for and supervising children, grandchildren	29.4	43.5	38.4	44.0	37.7
Helping in children's households and farms	25.5	33.2	32.3	38.1	31.7
Caring for the ill, caring for another person	6.2	19.5	19.9	28.2	17.8
Public activities	9.9	7.7	10.6	13.7	10.6

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

Having studied the activities with regard to the level of schooling it seems that many more pensioners with better education spend their time caring for and supervising grandchildren than those who have just 8 grades of elementary education. Supervision of grandchildren is the task of nearly 50% of the 60–75 year old pensioners who have a degree, while this ratio among those who have only 8 grades is less than 30%. The less educated ones make up for this 'fault' by agricultural work and by tending animals: that amounts to 15–16 percentage points more than those with a degree who do these types of tasks. Could it be that parents prefer to leave their children with the more educated grandparents,

who can help in school work and have no tasks outside the house (in the fields, garden or with animals), than with those who actually are closer to the grandchildren and can supervise them?

Studying the differences from the aspect of the type of settlement people live in, the lifestyle characteristics are more pronounced. For 60–75 year old pensioners living in villages regular, out-of-the-house activities (the land, garden, animals) predominate the frequency in their case is higher than in case for those doing housekeeping activities. Yet from among village pensioners, a lot less participate in supervising grandchildren than among those who live in Budapest or in larger towns. Figures create the strange feeling that in pensioner groups with either low or high levels of schooling living in urban or village areas, tasks related to agriculture and animals or tasks related to caring for children or grandchildren are somehow interchangeable activities.

Table 19
*60–75 year old pensioners doing agricultural work, tending animals
and supervising children by levels of education and
by the type of settlement they live in
(2001/2002) (as a % of those affected)*

	Agricultural work, tending garden and animals	Keeping pets	Caring for and super- vising children, grandchildren
Level of education			
Less than 8 grades	64.8	68.0	27.8
8 grades	66.7	69.2	38.4
Vocational secondary school	67.2	65.6	37.1
Matriculation	56.5	55.6	43.9
Higher education	49.0	45.9	48.1
Type of settlement:			
Budapest	43.6	47.1	41.0
Town with county rank	50.5	45.3	42.7
Other town	61.4	66.5	38.3
Village	75.9	76.4	32.8
Total	63.5	65.4	37.7

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

The differences in the supervision of children and grandchildren seen as a function of the settlement are also related to the extent to which pensioners have a chance to take care of the grandchildren day after day either in Budapest, in other towns, or in the villages. It is well known that this task is not only

performed by those who live in the same house, but also by those whose children had already left the family home and set up their own. We have seen that a significant percentage of pensioners living in single person households or those living just the two of them together (29 and 38%, respectively) care regularly for their grandchildren.

78% of the 60–75 year old pensioners have at least one child who lives in a separate household. Regular, everyday supervision of grandchildren living in separate households can be done only if the different generation members of the family live in the same settlement. According to our data, going from Budapest towards the villages the ratio of pensioners whose grown up offspring ‘remained local’ drops significantly.

Table 20
60–75 year old pensioners by types of settlement and by the residence of their children living in separate households (2001/2002) (%)

Where children in separate households live:	Budapest	Town with county rank	Other town	Village	Total
N=	(621)	(633)	(880)	(1249)	(3383)
Same settlement with parents	44.6	47.2	43.5	24.2	37.3
Another settlement	12.4	17.9	19.1	34.4	23.3
Have children living in the same settlement and also in another settlement	9.3	16.7	18.6	22.3	17.9
Have no children in separate households	34.0	18.2	18.8	19.1	21.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ‘Turning points’ panel survey.

True enough, we do not know the number or the age of grandchildren who do not live with aging parents. Nevertheless, we can see clearly that Budapest or urban pensioners are more likely to do the everyday tasks around their children and grandchildren who live in separate households. The reason is that a great number of village pensioners (a lot more than those in towns) allowed their children to leave for other settlements, perhaps because of the better opportunities to study or to find jobs.

The impact of employment of pensioners can hardly be evaluated because, as we have seen before, very few of the 60–75 year olds actually work. They work a lot less – understandably – around the house or animals. Nevertheless we have noticed that taking a job or the level of education might have some role in the extent of participating in public life. 30% of the pensioners with a

degree and one quarter of those working on the regular basis do regularly some public activity. However, due to their small ratio, this hardly improves the 10–11% average of those pensioners who do public tasks.

Health has practically no impact on housekeeping activities being the most important daily activity; it seems that housekeeping tasks cannot be avoided even for those for whom they are really difficult to do. The differences due to health reasons are more marked in tasks requiring physical energy and in family tasks, or even in public activities.

Table 21
*Differences due to health reasons in activities done by
60–75 year old pensioners
(2001/2002) (as a % of those affected)*

Tasks	Health in daily activities		
	severely	lightly, it varies	does not
	hinder the person		
Housekeeping	67.8	76.2	68.8
Agricultural work, garden, animals	49.2	66.3	67.0
Keeping pets	56.2	68.0	65.6
Housework, repair, maintenance	39.6	49.4	55.7
Caring for and supervising children, grandchildren	28.2	35.7	44.3
Helping in children's households and farms	22.1	31.7	37.2
Caring for the ill or for other persons	15.3	18.3	18.7
Public activities	4.7	10.3	14.1

Source: 'Turning points' panel survey.

As we have shown earlier, 20% of men and 30% of women of the age of 70–75 feel hindered doing their everyday tasks. The situation probably deteriorates with age, and bad health would be one of the major hindrances of regular activities later in life, in real old age. While biological aging naturally brings about a decline in the activities which prove to be beyond one's energy, in actual fact some of them are simply omitted, we cannot consider it a natural process when elderly people are forced into inactivity due to severe health problems.

We could draw certain conclusions for the activities of pensioners if we looked at the number of regular activities in the study done day by day by the pensioners. However, a hypothesis which says that the more types of tasks and obligations one has, the more active he/she is, would not be realistic. We do not have information on the intensity of the activities done by the aging people. Some of them could be a total physical and psychological burden for the entire day – such as for example taking care of ill people. Nevertheless, we can say

with some assurance that if none of the studied 8 types of activities are present as regular daily activities for the 60–75 year old pensioner (and if that person does not do any income generating job either), than that person has meaningless, dull days without any rhythm in them. On the other hand, if one has many (at least five or more) daily tasks and obligations, he/she has a very good chance of spending his/her days actively, eventfully with a good rhythm.

We could say that 60–75 year old pensioners have an average of two-three tasks and obligations a day. It is difficult to say if this is a lot or too few because as we have said, even just one activity can fill one's day, while sometimes three-four activities could be done comfortably, one after another. The two extremes are those without any tasks (passive ones) and those with five or more (active ones). The ratio of the passive ones is 9.7%, that of the active ones is 14.5%.

It is no coincidence that the rate of the passive ones is higher than average among those who are seriously hindered by health in their daily activities (19%), and it is higher also among those who have less than 8 grades of education (14%). The rate of the active ones is around average in almost all the categories, 14–15%, village dwellers reach just a few percentage point above (18,4%), as well as those who live in partnerships but in a larger family (18,3%). It is worth mentioning that among pensioners with university degree, there is a significantly higher ratio of passive people and less active ones (12% in both sides). We have already mentioned that pensioners with a degree have better chances of finding an income generating job than those with a lower level of education: 23% of them work regularly, 8–9% work on and off (in case of old age pensioners as a whole, only 7 and 4%), that is, most of their time is spent working. But it is probably not only work that excuses them fully or partially from household or other family tasks and obligations. Pensioners with a degree are likely to have less difficulties in finding activities for themselves which suit their own interests, inclinations or else (hobby, culture, studying, Internet, etc.) which were not covered by the present survey.

CONCLUSION

The extent to which people reaching old age can preserve their activities and to the extent they have meaningful daily tasks have an outstanding role in the quality of their lives. Our study discusses the typical characteristics of age, economic activities, family relations, and health of 60–75 year old men and woman based on a recently launched panel based survey. Studying these three variants we can say that balanced family relations (maintenance of partnerships, proximity of children) and an acceptable health condition could significantly slow down the loss of useful activities which is natural with age.

Translated by Ildikó Várhegyi

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