

Original article

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Life style and problems of elderly people in Uzbekistan

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Abstract. The article deals with one of the main problems of gerontology and sociology. It is, in particular, about social activity of elderly people, motives and factors that induce them to social activity, as well as spheres in which their social activity is manifested. The statistical data of the Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the data obtained on the basis of sociological research conducted under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) Population Fund are analyzed. In addition, the author of the article reveals the nuances of the lifestyle of older people in Uzbekistan, shedding light on the unique challenges they face and the opportunities that lie ahead. As the demographic landscape around the world is undergoing significant changes, Uzbekistan is no exception, taking steps to combat the aging population. The study uses a multidimensional approach to comprehensively analyze the socioeconomic, health and cultural aspects that shape the lives of older people in this Central Asian country. Relying on a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study reflects the multifaceted challenges faced by the older population. Economic constraints, access to health care and social isolation emerge as key themes with implications for their overall well-being. In addition, the article explores the cultural dynamics affecting the lifestyles of the elderly, traditional family structures, social relationships, and the process of how urbanization affects their daily lives. By bridging the gap between academic research and practical implications, the article contributes to a better understanding of the complex issues surrounding the livelihoods of the elderly population in Uzbekistan. The author offers insights that can help in policy implementation in close collaboration with the community.

Keywords: aging, old age, demographic transition, “third age”, social activity, active aging, active aging index, motive

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Научная статья

Жизненный стиль и проблемы пожилых людей в Узбекистане

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Аннотация. В статье рассмотрена одна из основных проблем геронтологии и социологии. Речь идет, в частности, о социальной активности пожилых людей, мотивах и факторах, побуждающих их к социальной активности, а также сферах, в которых проявляется их социальная активность. Проанализированы статистические данные Агентства Республики

Узбекистан и данные, полученные на основе социологических исследований, проведенных под эгидой Фонда Организации Объединенных Наций (ООН) в области народонаселения. Кроме того, автор статьи раскрывает нюансы образа жизни пожилых людей в Узбекистане, проливая свет на уникальные проблемы, с которыми они сталкиваются, и открывающиеся возможности. Поскольку демографический ландшафт в мире претерпевает значительные изменения, Узбекистан не является исключением, предпринимая меры борьбы со старением населения. В исследовании используется многомерный подход для всестороннего анализа социально-экономических, медицинских и культурных аспектов, которые формируют жизнь пожилых людей в этой центральноазиатской стране. Опираясь на сочетание количественных опросов и качественных интервью, исследование отражает многогранные проблемы, с которыми сталкивается пожилое население. Экономические ограничения, доступность здравоохранения и социальная изоляция становятся ключевыми темами, имеющими последствия для их общего благосостояния. Кроме того, в статье исследованы культурная динамика, влияющая на образ жизни пожилых людей, традиционные семейные структуры, общественные отношения и процесс влияния урбанизации на их повседневную жизнь. Преодолевая разрыв между академическими исследованиями и практическими последствиями, статья способствует лучшему пониманию сложных проблем, связанных с жизнедеятельностью пожилого населения в Узбекистане. Автор предлагает идеи, которые могут помочь в реализации политики в тесном взаимодействии с сообществом.

Ключевые слова: старение, старость, демографический переход, «третий возраст», социальная активность, активное старение, индекс активного старения, мотив

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Introduction

As the world's population ages, attention is increasingly turning to understanding the unique lifestyles and challenges faced by older people around the world. In this quest, Uzbekistan, with its rich cultural heritage and rapidly evolving social landscape, offers a compelling case study. In Uzbekistan, as in many other nations, the elderly population plays a vital role in the social fabric, contributing wisdom, experience, and cultural continuity. However, living in Uzbekistan is not without its complexities as they navigate a changing world and face multiple challenges.

This article embarks on a journey to delve into the intricate tapestry of the lives of the elderly in Uzbekistan, shedding light on the cultural, social, and economic dimensions that shape their existence. From traditional family structures to the impact of modernization on societal norms, we aim to paint a comprehensive portrait of the Uzbek elderly experience. We will also explore the challenges facing this population, from healthcare and financial concerns to issues of social isolation and evolving generational dynamics.

The issues of renovation of civil society and the rule of law in the Republic of Uzbekistan are relevant. «Civil society at the present stage has become a paradigm that determines the possible direction of public reforms. The use of the concept of “civil society” as a theoretical category for the analysis and explanation of the phenomena of social reality is fully justified» [1, p. 45]. In this regard, a very important role is played by a part of the population, i.e. the older generation. The elderly population of Uzbekistan represents a reservoir of knowledge and traditions, but the extent to which they are integrated into the changing dynamics of the nation remains a critical aspect of social development. By unraveling the lifestyles of Uzbeks

kistan's elders and examining the challenges they face, we hope to foster a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate society.

Materials and Methods

The preparation of this article involved a combination of research, understanding of the topic, and creative expression. For example, it involved gathering information about the demographic structure of Uzbekistan, focusing on the size, distribution, and social roles of the elderly population. It also explored cultural aspects that are integral to the lifestyles of older people in Uzbekistan, such as family traditions, societal expectations, and cultural norms. While reviewing the existing literature on aging, elderly care, and societal changes in Uzbekistan to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject, we identified key challenges facing the elderly in Uzbekistan, drawing from academic articles, reports, and studies. It is also to admit that it was used the methods of analysis and synthesis, sociometric survey and monitoring.

By using these methods, the article was likely crafted to provide readers with a compelling and informative entry point into exploring the lifestyles and challenges faced by older people in Uzbekistan.

Results

At present, due to the increase in the average life expectancy and the decrease in the birth rate, the aging of the population, i.e. the increase in the proportion of older people in the population, is observed in most developed countries [2, p. 324]. As in the developed countries of the world, in Uzbekistan over the last 10–15 years the share of representatives of the older generation in the age structure of the population has been increasing year by year. At the beginning of 2009, the share of elderly people in the age structure of the country was 1,586,907, i.e. 5.8 percent, and by the beginning of 2023 this figure will be 3,283,656, i.e. 9.1 percent of the total population. The average annual growth rate of the elderly population between 2009 and 2023 is 217,602 persons, or an average of 7.1 % per year. By the beginning of 2023, the elderly will make up 9.1 percent of the total population [3].

If, as in many developed countries of the world, the age is analyzed from the age of 65, at the beginning of 2009 the share of elderly people aged 65 and older in the country was 1,185,517 people, that is, 4.3 percent (men — 3, 8 percent, women — 4.9 percent). By the beginning of 2023 this number increased to 1,927,090 people, i.e. 5.1 percent of the population of the republic (men — 4.7 percent, women — 6.0 percent) (figure 1). This situation indicates that Uzbekistan is on the threshold of old age.

Such an increase in the number of older people in the age structure of the population can be explained, firstly, by the high birth rate in the fifties and sixties of the last century, and, secondly, by an increase in average life expectancy and an increase in the quality of medical services provided to the population. In addition, during 2009–2023, the birth rate in Uzbekistan was high (stable).

The current legislation on the retirement age in Uzbekistan provides for the possibility of retirement for women at the age of 55 and for men at the age of 60. The increasing share of the older generation in the population of the country encourages (forces) the government of the country to consider the issue of gradual increase of the retirement age. The high birth rate and the large working-age

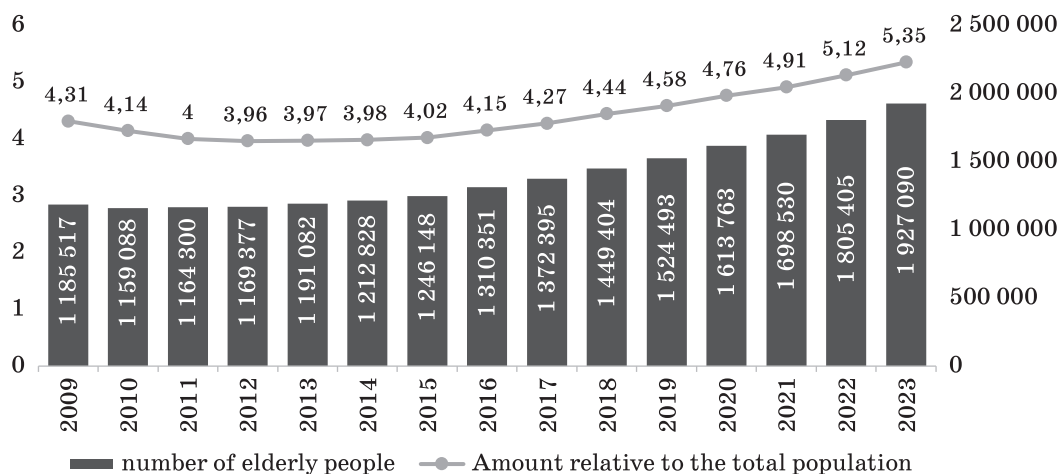


Fig. 1. Dynamics of the number of persons aged 65 and over in the age structure of the population, 2009–2023 (in numbers and percentages)¹

Рис. 1. Динамика численности пожилых людей в возрасте 65 лет и старше в возрастной структуре населения, 2009–2023 гг. (в количественном и процентном выражении)

population in the country complicate these efforts in some cases. Increasing the retirement age, in turn, requires ensuring the employment of the elderly, creating acceptable and comfortable conditions for them, the health of the elderly, and the effective and meaningful organization of free time. Despite the reforms and measures aimed at improving the standard of living of the elderly, the development of an active aging index and a systematic assessment of the actual condition of the elderly are of urgent importance.

Based on the development of the index of active aging, the identification of the unused potential of the elderly through sociological research and the evaluation of the conditions created for them provides an opportunity to improve the quality of life and active longevity of the representatives of the elderly generation, and to develop reasonable proposals for the elimination of existing obstacles and problems of the elderly. Therefore, it is important to find ways and methods to activate the social behavior of the older generation, recognizing the changed role of the active generation today, and to search for ways and methods to activate their social behavior due to the recognition of the changed role of a more business-like person. is one of the important issues [4, p. 157].

Population has a great influence on economic, political and social processes. Uzbekistan ranks 105th in the world in terms of population longevity [5]. According to the statistics agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the life expectancy in our country in 2022 is 74.3 years (72.1 years for men, 76.6 years for women) [3].

Active ageing applies to a number of policy areas: promoting employment and social participation, reducing poverty, improving health, enhancing well-being and many more. Although such policies tend to focus on specific objectives, they should be integrated into a single global approach that affects all aspects of older people's lives, many of which are included in the Active Aging Index (AAI) project [6].

¹ The calculation was made based on the information of the Statistical Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

In August — September 2023 the sociological survey was conducted in Andijan, Bukhara, Kashkadarya, Samarkand, Syrdarya, Khorezm regions and Tashkent city in cooperation with specialists of the Research Institute «Family and Women» and sociologists of the National Institute of Economic Research of Moldova with the financial support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)¹. The survey included 3 017 respondents in order to obtain objective information on the situation of the population aged 55 and over, to identify their basic needs, and to develop proposals and recommendations for the formulation of a comprehensive active ageing policy. The respondents were sampled using statistical data on region, gender, age and place of residence (city/district) as a basis for representativeness.

Older people's employment reflects the opportunities in the labour market and their personal preferences, abilities and opportunities. In most countries, the presence of older people in the labour market is not a conscious, personal and free choice, but a necessity. This is because low pensions force older people either to work longer or to look for alternative sources of income. The results of the survey showed that older people are very little involved in economic activities.

Only 11.2 % of the elderly respondents were engaged in paid work. The largest number of elderly engaged in such activities was recorded in Andijan region (21.0 %), while the lowest rate was found in Bukhara region (6.0 %) and Tashkent city (2.0 %). 67.9 % of the elderly engaged in paid economic activity were men, 32.1 % were women. At the same time, it was revealed that 4.0 % of the elderly were engaged in paid entrepreneurship. At the same time, 237 people, i.e. 7.9 % of the elderly, want to return to their previous place of work.

The cross-regional analysis showed a different picture. The most active older people in paid economic activity were recorded in the Andijan region. 2 out of 10 people in this region answered in the affirmative when asked whether they were engaged in paid work. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the region is the most densely populated in the country; secondly, the population of the region has always been engaged in trade, handicrafts and family household activities; and thirdly, the population has a strong tendency to engage in entrepreneurship. The regions of Khorezm (13.9 %), Syrdarya (12.1 %) and Samarkand (11.9 %) are next in this respect. (figure 2). It was an unexpected result that the least engaged elderly in economic activity were recorded in Tashkent.

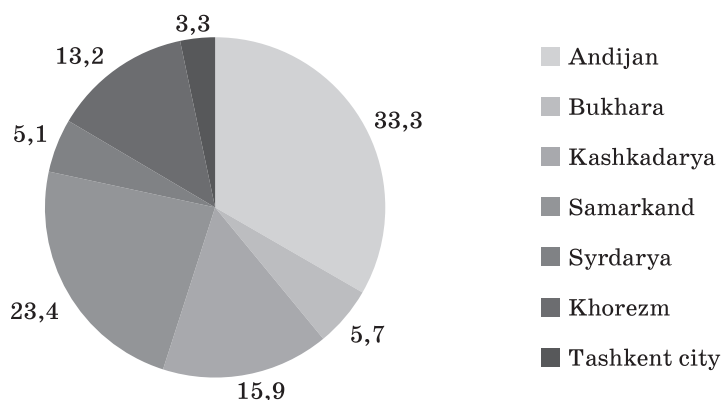


Fig. 2. Composition of employed respondents in a cross-section of regions, %
Рис. 2. Состав респондентов, занятых на оплачиваемой работе в регионах, %

¹ The survey was conducted using the interview method among 3017 household members in aged 55 years and older, conventionally called «elderly people».

In our opinion, the following are the main reasons why a small number of older people in Tashkent do not engage in paid activities:

1. First, there is a high level of internal labor migration in Uzbekistan. Mostly young people from the regions come to Tashkent to work.

2. Second, many young people and university graduates stay in Tashkent to work and live.

3. Third, there is a small proportion of external labor migration among Tashkent residents.

4. Fourth, young people occupy many fields that require intellectual work, and there is strong competition here.

5. Fifth, because young people leave older people to work in Tashkent and abroad, vacant jobs in regions.

The participation of the elderly in social life, regardless of its nature, is another important aspect of the analysis of the situation of the elderly. On the one hand, the active participation of the elderly and the support of their active status at this level indicates their activity and civic spirit, and on the other hand, it shows the openness of the society to the integration of the elderly and the support of their activities without stigmatization and stereotypes.

According to the analysis, almost 80 percent of older people do not participate in voluntary activities. Volunteering among older people tends to be more short-term than long-term organized practice.

Most elderly people mainly help other categories of elderly people, young people or the needy. It should be noted that a detailed analysis of the level of participation of older people in social activities according to the type of organization or service did not show significant differences in the main socio-demographic characteristics. Thus, regardless of the type of organization/service, the characteristics of the respondents based on these variables are very similar.

Only every tenth elderly person participates in the provision of social services, social or charitable activities, and only 5 % of elderly people participate in activities related to education, culture and sports.

It was also observed that in rural areas, older people are more likely to participate in social services, social activities or charity events, and in urban areas, the level of participation in educational, cultural, sports and professional activities is slightly higher. In addition to volunteer work or supporting family and other activities, older people can actively participate in social life through civic activism and other activities and show that they are not indifferent to society. The analysis of the results shows that older people participate more in the discussion of bills (36.4 %) and in trade union meetings (35.5 %), and the least in petitions, suggestions and complaints to politicians or government officials about social problems (16.3 %). (figure 3).

The results show that elderly people living in rural areas are more active in social life than those living in cities. The urban respondents stated that they would participate more in the discussion of draft laws. At the same time, it was observed that there was a more significant difference between the city and the countryside in the implementation of public control over the activities of state bodies: the share of rural elderly people who indicated their participation in this type of activity was 12 % higher than that of urban residents.

At the same time, the rural elderly (23.4 %) are twice as likely as the urban elderly (10.3 %) to make suggestions or appeals to politicians or government officials. Such a large difference between the rural and urban populations can be explained by the fact that rural elders have easier access to government officials.



Fig. 3. Participation in volunteer activities by gender and type of activity, %

Рис. 3. Участие респондентов в волонтерской деятельности по полу и видам деятельности, %

It is easier and more convenient to access and approach political structures in rural areas than in cities. At the same time, teamwork is also important in this situation. In rural areas, authorities and community representatives know each other personally, which in turn simplifies the application process.

As a result of the research, the point of view that representatives of the older generation with higher level of education have a significantly higher level of civic activity compared to older people with lower level of education. A higher level of education is also associated with a higher level of social activity among older people. A small difference between educated older people with different levels of education was observed only in terms of participation in trade union meetings, while in other respects, more educated older people were more likely to participate in the community. They were almost five times more likely to participate in their work. For example, it was found that 52 % of seniors with higher education, 41 % with secondary education, 26 % with secondary education and 22 % with primary education participate in the discussion of draft laws.

Research has shown that older people with low levels of education have more health problems. More than 30 % of the elderly with primary education rated their health as poor or very poor, and this ratio was 3 times higher for the elderly with average education, secondary special education, it was found to be 5 times lower for the educated elderly and 6 times lower for the elderly with higher education. It was found that 36.3 percent of the elderly suffered from chronic diseases.

More women (41.2 %) than men (30.3 %) reported having a chronic disease. The percentage of elderly women with chronic diseases was 10 % higher than that

of men. According to the urban-rural ratio, the elderly living in rural areas (41.0 %) were 10 % more likely to suffer from chronic diseases than those living in urban areas (32.2 %). Most of the elderly with chronic diseases suffer from high blood pressure (37 %), high cholesterol (12 %), arthritis, osteoarthritis and rheumatism (10 %), cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (9 %).

Only 15 % of older adults surveyed said they needed physical help from others in their daily lives. This means that most older people are unable to move around independently and need the help of others. It was found that the percentage of older people who needed help with daily personal care was almost the same by gender (14 %) and by where they lived (16 %). It was also found that the older the age group, the higher the proportion of older people who needed help with daily self-care and mobility. Older people aged 75 and over (32.7 %) were almost four times more likely to need help than those aged 55–59 (9.6 %).

Discussion

It was found that there is a strong inverse relationship between the level of education of the elderly and the need for help from others in everyday life. More than 40 % of elderly people with primary education need help in everyday life. In this regard, the percentage of elderly with higher education who need help is four times lower. It should be noted that the number of people who need help from others in everyday life decreases as the level of education increases.

The physical challenges older people face intersect with the chronic diseases they report. In particular, problems getting up or walking/climbing stairs after long periods of sitting are closely related to cardiovascular disease. At the same time, 2 out of 10 respondents said they had difficulty being physically active for more than 2 hours. Similarly, 13.3 % of the elderly find it difficult to get up after sitting for a long time in a chair or armchair. And 10 % of respondents have difficulty walking 100 meters, as well as climbing a few steps on the stairs without resting. It should be noted that 1/5 of the elderly who took part in the survey did not have any difficulties in their daily activities due to illness or physical weakness in the last 3 months.

In the past 12 months, the majority of elderly people (82.3 %) received medical treatment out of necessity. The percentage of those who received medical treatment out of necessity (82.3 %) was much higher than the number of elderly people who used dental services (51.7 %) — 82.3 % and 51.7 %, respectively. The percentage of rural elderly people who received dental services out of necessity in the past 12 months is about 6% lower than the percentage of urban elderly people. One of the reasons for this may be the lack or underdevelopment of medical infrastructure (dental services) in rural areas.

The results of the study showed that nearly 90 percent of the elderly live in extended families. More than 60 percent of the elderly live with their spouses and adult children, about ¼ of them are children of the elderly, 5 percent live in nuclear families, and only 4 percent live alone.

The fact that the majority of older people feel good, active and refreshed means that their mental health is at a high level. More than 70 % of seniors surveyed always or often feel alert and in a good mood, feel more active and determined, wake up refreshed and relaxed, and 55 % feel active and alert.

In general, the elderly are more involved in caring for grandchildren and children. 72.7 percent of the elderly take care of their grandchildren and 67.6 percent take care of their children. This situation indicates that the country has acquired a traditional and territorial character.

In theory, living with children not only allows the elderly to be integrated and not feel isolated, but also protects them from certain financial problems. Despite the fact that most elderly people have a similar situation in terms of type of household, their actual financial situation was found to be very different [7]. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the respondents of the older generation are able to buy everything they need without reducing their usual expenses, but 15 % of them cannot afford to buy even the most necessary things and 20 % have enough money only for the necessary things.

Conclusions

It has been found that older people often have some financial resources to cover current and emergency expenses, but they are less likely to have savings that would allow them to buy more expensive goods or cover unexpected expenses. In general, more than 60 percent of the older generation's basic needs are met. When it comes to more expensive items or unexpected expenses, only 40 percent of seniors say they have no problem covering them. However, only 18 percent of seniors can afford to buy a car.

The level of material poverty in cities is much lower than in rural areas. In order to increase the social activity of the elderly, based on the conducted sociological research, it is recommended to implement the following proposals:

- to enact the Law on the Elderly in order to ensure the rights and freedoms of the elderly and to establish order in this field. With the support of relevant ministries and organizations, create mechanisms to increase the legal knowledge of the elderly;
- reform of the pension calculation procedure to allow citizens to choose one of two types of pension payment procedures, paid by the state and the private sector, based on foreign experience;
- to increase the amount of pensions and to create alternative ways to meet the material needs of the elderly, i.e. to encourage the elderly to engage in entrepreneurial activities, to create suitable jobs for the elderly, to sponsor the elderly;
- to review and reform the working mechanisms of the system in order to eliminate the elements of personal interest and corruption, to identify and eliminate excessive bureaucracy, unnecessary procedures in the system of social assistance, health care and sports;
- to determine the health insurance system and its guarantees, which will be saved for the representatives of the older generation, taking into account that the main expenses are spent on medical services and medicines;
- introduction of legal, computer literacy and healthy lifestyle courses for the elderly in Makhalla under the health system organizations;
- to improve the quality of medical care provided by family polyclinics, to further develop forms of services that replace inpatient treatment.

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