



Seniors in Society. Strategies to Retain Individual Autonomy

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The research project on “Seniors in Society. Strategies to Retain Individual Autonomy” (2002 – 2004) is supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. It’s importance is emphasized by the relevance of social and economic aspects of demographic ageing of the population and that of fundamental changes associated with the transformation of Czech society.

The objectives of the research are (1) to find out seniors’ material and social resources supporting their relative autonomy in everyday life, (2) to record their personal expectations from state, community, or formal and informal support and aid institutions, respectively, and (3) to uncover their engagement in social interaction and individual experiencing of the integration into social groups. The data acquired become the base for (4) identifying the typologies corresponding to the levels of seniors' social integration (i.e. groups of relatives, friends, neighbours, special-interest and professional groups). By applying qualitative methods, we explore (5) strategies of everyday life and coping with life cycle events and crisis within particular types. Special attention is paid to the family background of the seniors, including relatives in the vertical line. Specifically, we focus on (6) conditions under which family is capable and willing to help or actually is helping it’s oldest members, as well as on their interpretation within (7) identified types of the relatives supportive systems.

The research project is designed to understand the actor’s interpretation of social activities, social situations and events and follows a so-called *integrated research* approach. This allows us to combine significant advantages of both quantitative and qualitative approach and to *virtually* (not formally by lining “one after another”, in sequence) integrates both during the entire research processes. (A sequential approach is applied only in the sense that the integrated research is followed by a “pure” qualitative study based on the grounded theory method. See Strauss and Corbin’s concept.) This type of the research is truly multi-source research, designed to record how the seniors, their adult children and social workers professionally engaged in care of the elderly interpret old age, seniors’ autonomy, conditions and strategies of it’s maintenance. In the recording and interpretation stage we also incorporate the view of the researchers – questioners and scholars – and merge their meaning horizons.

The contributions expected in this final year’s phase are: construction of a "map" of seniors’ living conditions, formulation of proposals for improvement of assistance systems in terms of integration of formal and informal family help and aid systems, contributing to the development of sociological theory and methodology of qualitative studies, which are primarily essential in the field of social policy and work.

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