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SLAVINSKI Marina

**SEXUALITY AS A FACTOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-
BEING IN OLD AGE**

ABSTRACT

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Composition of the committee for the public defense of the doctoral thesis:

1. **RACU Jana, President**, Habilitated Doctor in Psychology, Full Professor, Moldova State University
2. **Tolstaia Svetlana, PhD supervisor**, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor, Moldova State University
3. **GLAVAN Aurelia, official opponent**, Habilitated Doctor in Psychology, Full Professor, "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University
4. **BRICEAG Silvia, official opponent**, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor, "Alec Russo" Balti State University
5. **TARNOVSKI Anna, official opponent**, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor, Moldova State University
6. **BODRUG-LUNGU Valentina, commission member**, Habilitated Doctor in Pedagogy, Full Professor, Moldova State University

The public defense will take place on 11th October 2024 at 12:00 at the meeting of the Doctoral Committee, room 507, building 3, Moldova State University, str. 65A M. Kogalniceanu Street, Chisinau, MD-2012.

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Abstract has been sent on September 04, 2024

President of the Doctoral Committee

RACU Jana

Habilitated Doctor in Psychology, Full Professor, Moldova State University



Scientific supervisor:

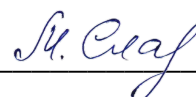
TOLSTAIA Svetlana,

PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor



Author:

SLAVINSKI Marina



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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

The relevance and importance of the research topic. The relevance of this study is underscored by the significant global aging trend, which necessitates a re-examination of concepts, including psychological ones, that define old age. According to WHO forecasts, the proportion of people over 60 years old in the global population will almost double from 12% to 22% between 2015 and 2050 [34]. Similar trends are observed in Moldova and Israel. Preliminary data from the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova for 2023 indicate that the aging rate has risen to 23,8%, meaning that every fourth resident of Moldova is now 60 or older, and by 2040, every second resident will be over 50. Of the total number of elderly people, 60.1% were women, one in three were aged between 60 and 64 years (32.6%), and 10.0% were people over 80 years of age [35]. In 2020, approximately 1.1 million individuals aged 65 and older resided in Israel, with the Ministry of Health projecting this number to double by 2040 [36]. The increasing number of older adults introduces significant changes to societal characteristics and functionality, as the aging population presents unresolved social, economic, medical, and cultural challenges that necessitate the creation of numerous opportunities for the elderly across various life domains, thus affecting their psychological well-being. In light of the general trend of increasing life expectancy and global aging, it is essential to study the factors affecting the quality of life of older adults, ensuring not only physical comfort but also psychological well-being.

Framing the topic in the international, national, and local preoccupations of the research team and an inter- and transdisciplinary context, presentation of previous research results related to the research topic. The perception of this life stage has evolved from a medical and biological model, which views aging through the lens of functional decline, to a psychological and social (holistic) model that emphasizes psychological development and considers aging as a peak period of human psychological development [11]. By the early 21st century, the scientific perspective began to view old age as a productive stage of ontogenesis, leading to the emergence of concepts such as 'active aging' [37, 38], 'successful aging' [28], and 'happy aging' [21, 30].

Currently, psychological well-being is a widely recognized concept in modern psychology. Psychoanalytic theories interpret psychological well-being as the absence of neuroses [19], the absence of pronounced psychological defense mechanisms [20], the ability to establish and maintain social relationships [24], and the capacity for integrity and individuation [23]. Humanistic psychology emphasizes personality development over the absence of defects [14, 15, 29]. Various researchers link psychological well-being with life satisfaction, determined by personal experiences and the balance of negative and positive effects [16, 17, 27, 32]. Significant contributions to the study of psychological well-being were made by C.D. Ryff [33], who highlighted aspects such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Moldovan researchers T. Turchină, C. Platon, and Z. Bolea [8] consider psychological well-being within the context of an individual's quality of life, emphasizing its importance in defining this concept. The works of J. Racu and F-M. Voicu on the meaningfulness and life satisfaction of the elderly are also notable [9]. S. Rusnac [5] and S. Tolstaia [7] highlight the significance of professional life. A. Glavan [4] addresses the importance of the emotional sphere in treating physical illnesses in old age. N. Balode and I. Grecu-Stăvilă [1] explore the role of awareness and the expression of sexuality.

Despite numerous studies on the psychological well-being of various gender and age categories, social statuses, etc., issues related to the sexual aspect of older adults' lives

remain underexplored. It is important to emphasize that sexual well-being is a significant component of psychological well-being. This state of affairs requires a more thorough study of the relationship between sexuality and psychological well-being in old age.

In the context of the aging of the population of our planet, there is an increasing need to study the relationship between sexuality and psychological well-being in old age, including to improve the mechanisms for implementing social policy in this area. Thus, contradictions are revealed: between the requirements of state policies in the field of promoting active and healthy aging programs and the lack of research on sexuality as one of the components of health and psychological well-being in old age; between the need to study the sexual sphere and the absence of diagnostic tools that allow studying the peculiarities of sexuality in older people; between the need to create an environment that promotes the experience of subjective psychological well-being and the absence of scientifically based practices for psychological support and optimization of the psychological well-being of older people. All of the above seems to us a **significant scientific problem**, which is the need to: study sexuality in old age and its relationship with the subjective experience of a sense of psychological well-being, taking into account gender, age, level of education and marital status; development of diagnostic tools that allow to investigate the characteristics of sexuality of older people; development and implementation of a program to form a positive image of sexuality of older people, contributing to an increase in the level of psychological well-being.

Thus, **the subject of study** is sexuality as a factor in the psychological well-being of older people.

The research aim is to investigate sexuality as a factor affecting psychological well-being in old age.

To accomplish the proposed goal, the following **objectives** were established:

1. Analyze existing approaches in modern scientific literature to the problems of psychological well-being, the phenomenon of sexuality, and the socio-psychological characteristics of old age.
2. Develop and validate a diagnostic questionnaire aimed at studying sexuality in old age.
3. Empirically investigate the level of psychological well-being and the peculiarities of sexuality in the elderly.
4. Determine the significance of sexuality in the subjective experience of psychological well-being among the elderly, considering socio-biological factors.
5. Develop and test a training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age.
6. Formulate conclusions and develop recommendations for older people, for psychologists and professionals in the helping professions, institutions and decision-making bodies.

The main **hypothesis** of the study is that elderly individuals who remain sexually active and exhibit a high level of sexuality demonstrate a higher level of psychological well-being.

Provisions for defense:

1. Active sexual behavior in old age is associated with a more active life stance.
2. A positive attitude toward one's body contributes to active sexual behavior in the elderly.

3. Overestimating the importance of penetrative sex in old age leads to insecurity and a loss of meaning in sexuality. Expanding the repertoire of lovemaking helps maintain and increase pleasure and sexual activity.

4. With age there is a tendency to decrease the level of self-acceptance, which is associated with the fact that it is difficult for a person to accept the fact of his/her own ageing and the associated fact of limitation of the habitual way of life..

Summary of research methodology and justification of research methods selected. Theoretical and methodological basis of the study was formed by: theoretical approaches to age-related changes in the human psyche; concepts of human sexual activity throughout life; theory of psychological well-being; theories about the essence of positive human functioning; WHO concept of sexuality and sexual health; principle of social conditioning of the psyche *empirical methods* (expert evaluation, surveys, testing with instruments such as the “Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being”, adapted by Н.Н. Лепешинский, and the author's questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)”; and *statistical and mathematical methods* (tabular and graphical representation, one-factor ANOVA analysis of variance, Student's T-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient).

Approbation and implementation of research results. The theoretical and empirical data obtained were discussed at international and national scientific conferences; and methodological seminars of the Association of Sexologists of Israel; and were applied in practical activities as a psychotherapist and sexologist specialist, within the framework of group therapy with older adults at the “Ela” center, and in lecture courses on *General Psychology, Age Psychology, Health Psychology, Fundamentals of Psychological Counseling, Positive and Narrative Psychotherapy*.

Structure and content of the work: the thesis contains of an abstract in Romanian, English, and Russian, content, introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, a bibliography (300 sources), and 5 appendices, along with a declaration of responsibility and the author's CV. The work includes 28 figures and 38 tables. The content of the paper is set out in 148 pages of main text.

Publications on the topic of the study. Based on the results of this study, 9 scientific papers were published: 6 articles in scientific journals and 3 publications in conference proceedings.

Keywords: old age, psychological well-being, sexuality, sexual activity, sexual health, sexual behavior, stereotypes about sexuality.

THESIS CONTENT

The *Introduction* argues the relevance and significance of the study in an international, national, regional, inter- and transdisciplinary context, presenting the results of previous research on the chosen topic; the goal, hypothesis and objectives of the study are determined; the synthesis of the research methodology and the selected research methods are described; the scientific novelty and originality of the work, theoretical and practical significance are determined; information on the approbation of the results obtained is included and a brief summary of the sections of the dissertation is presented.

The first chapter, *Theoretical approaches to studying sexuality and psychological well-being in old age*, analyzes modern approaches to the problem of old age. The concept of sexuality in old age, which prevails in modern psychology, is considered, the psychological characteristics of sexuality in old age, as well as the characteristics of sexual health and sexual relations in old age, are described; social factors affecting the sexual life of older people are presented. Approaches to understanding the term “psychological well-being” have been identified, and the main factors affecting psychological well-being in old age have been identified.

Different theoretical approaches have been analyzed on the *problem of sexuality*. From the point of view of the theoretical approach focusing on the influence of medical factors on sexuality, it is assumed that the declining age of mental, physical, and social resources of a person inevitably leads to a decrease in sexual activity. Studies performed within this paradigm demonstrate the sexual problems people face in old age [12]. It is important to note that within the medical discourse, it is assumed to understand penetrative sex as the norm throughout a person's life, which excludes the diversity of sexual experiences that exist in the golden years. Nevertheless, emotional intimacy, tactile sensations, and other forms of intimacy may be much more important for older people [26]. However, sexuality is not just a psycho-physiological given; it is closely linked to the norms of the culture that gives it this or that meaning and creates a language, to personal individuality, to the peculiarities of personal life, to socio-psychological characteristics, including interpersonal relations, etc.

In modern society, sexuality, intimacy, and sexual relationships are considered central and important in personal life and, at a fundamental level, constitute one of our basic human needs and a fundamental right. However, until relatively recently, much of the literature and discussion on these issues has not been relevant to older people, and the topic of sexuality in older people has remained taboo. Negative age stereotypes can lead to age discrimination - ageism. Studies have shown that older people internalize negative stereotypes that affect their physical, cognitive, and psychological health [31]. Thus, there is a construction of older age through mechanisms of control over sexuality and denial of the right to sexual activity. The negative effect of this rejection often leads older people to lose self-confidence, suppress their erotic feelings, and may cease to seek contact, love, warmth, and intimacy.

At the same time, sexuality is a lifelong phenomenon and exists in every person from the moment of his birth until the end of his life. Sexuality is a set of mental and physiological reactions, experiences, and actions associated with the manifestation and satisfaction of sexual desire [34].

Based on the above, *sexuality in old age*, in our opinion, is a concept that includes the desire to have sexual contact regardless of physiological abilities, the ability and willingness to accept age-related changes in sexual behavior (to find new alternatives to

achieve sexual satisfaction); a positive attitude towards one's body; and the ability to resist negative public opinion about sexuality in old age.

The concept of *psychological well-being* originates in ancient Greek philosophy: eudaemonism and continues in positive psychology. Currently, there are several concepts aimed at clarifying and explaining the phenomenon of psychological well-being. The main approaches can be structured into 4 groups. The first direction describes psychological well-being from the position of the process of satisfaction and dissatisfaction [27, 29], which emphasizes the balance of positive and negative emotions. The second group of theories includes ideas about positive personality functioning, individualization, self-actualization, and other phenomena described in the works of A. Maslow [14], C. Rogers [15], G. Allport [25], C. Jung [23]. The third group considers the phenomenon of psychological well-being in terms of psychophysiological functioning [28]. The fourth group includes concepts that consider psychological well-being as a general experience expressed in happiness, satisfaction with oneself and one's life, as well as subjective feelings related to basic human needs and values [17].

C.D. Ryff [33] successfully combined into a single model various approaches to understanding this phenomenon, namely: theories that consider independence, self-sufficiency, and personal growth as defining criteria of a normally functioning personality; concepts that emphasize the importance of positive interpersonal relationships for subjective feelings of well-being and happiness; approaches that consider the search for the meaning of life and the realization of life goals as determinants of personality development.

Analyzing the works devoted to psychological well-being in old age, it can be noted that the authors focus on such aspects as physiological limitations of the organism [10], which can manifest themselves more significantly than in young age and influence psychological well-being and manifestation of sexuality [13].

Since the late 1960s, theories such as the theory of gerontogenesis [10]; and life course theory, which marked the emergence of new scientific ideas about the possibilities of development in the late period of life and emphasized the preservation of the elderly person's personality [22], began to occupy an important place in the study of the peculiarities of the *elderly person's development*.

As S. Briceag notes, psychological and social age is judged by the functioning of psychological processes (intellectual, affective-motivational, etc.), the quality of social relationships, receptivity to new things, and diversity of interests. All this is connected with the physiological state of the body in general and the central nervous system in particular. They also depend on the life experience of the elderly person, his financial situation and family relationships [3].

The aging process is caused by various internal and external factors. Internal factors of aging consist in a special position of the laid down genotype, and external factors of aging consist of a certain lifestyle, level of physical activity, bad habits, and exposure to stresses and diseases [10]. Despite the large number of negative aspects of aging, there are also positive aspects in terms of cognition, for example, E. Erikson calls wisdom, which is a measure of experience, a strength, and the main advantage of older people [22].

In turn, WHO [34] in the World Report on Aging defines the term *healthy aging* as the process of developing and maintaining functional capacity that ensures well-being in old age. To preserve identity during this period, a person needs to resist social stereotypes concerning the lifestyle of older people, including sexuality.

Based on the review and analysis of the studies conducted, we can conclude that old age and aging are not only a period of decline of physiological functions, but also a period of a modern person's life, enormous in time and opportunities, in which one can and should be psychologically healthy and prosperous; in old age, psychological well-being has its own characteristics, depending both on the state of health and on a person's assessment of his life path, on internal standards, beliefs, as well as on the presence of support from significant others and the ability to function effectively in changed social conditions; sexuality and sexual relationships are the driving force behind a person's social activity at any age, since it is aimed at achieving not only sexual satisfaction, but also a socio-psychological state and a source of positive emotions, and as a result are one of the important components influencing psychological well-being .

The second chapter *Empirical Study of Sexuality as a Factor of Psychological Well-being in Old Age* outlines the subject, goals, objectives, and stages of the experimental study, describes the methods used, the results of the development, testing, validity and reliability of the author's questionnaire "Sexuality in older people (60+)"; shows the results obtained in the course of the experiment, analyses them, based on which the main conclusions are formulated.

The study aims to investigate sexuality in old age as a factor of psychological well-being.

The hypothesis of the study is the assumption that older people who remain sexually active and demonstrate a high level of sexuality are characterized by a higher level of psychological well-being, in particular, there are differences in the manifestation of the level of psychological well-being and features of sexuality in older people depending on gender, age, level of education and family status; there is a relationship between the manifestations of sexuality and the level of psychological well-being in old age.

The following **methods** were used in the study: the author's questionnaire "Sexuality in older people (60+)" and "Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-Being", adapted by Н.Н. Лепешинский.

The obtained data were processed using **statistical methods** of research - descriptive statistics (determination of mean, standard deviation, percentages), as well as inductive statistics (determination of Pearson's correlation coefficient, identification of differences between groups of data using Student's T-criterion, identification of differences between groups using one-factor analysis of variance ANOVA.

The study was conducted between August 2019 and October 2021 at organization "Ela" - Israeli Centre for Psychological Assistance in Life Crises. 202 people, 107 women and 95 men aged 60 years and older, with different marital status and education level, participated in the ascertaining experiment.

1. In accordance with the goals and objectives of the study, we **developed a questionnaire "Sexuality in older people (60+)"**, aimed at the study of the sexual sphere of older people, taking into account the biological and socio-psychological characteristics of this age, as well as following the ethical standards of psychodiagnostics and scientific research. The questionnaire consists of 30 statements with which a person can agree or disagree using five alternative Likert-type responses. The questionnaire includes 4 scales, each consisting of 6 sub-items (questions 1 to 24). Questions 25 to 30 focus on those older adults who remain sexually active. In the pilot study, 100 questionnaires were distributed. Some of the respondents (about 20% - 19 people) returned blank forms or did not return them at all, so the results of 81 questionnaires were processed to assess the validity of the

questionnaire [43]. All respondents were cognitively stable, heterosexual, and Russian-speaking natives of the former Soviet Union living in Israel at the time of the study.

To determine the *construct validity* of the questionnaire, we used Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency detection method. A sample size of >80 people satisfies the Cronbach's Alpha criterion and is greater than 0,7 for all 30 statements. According to the calculations, the Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency of the questionnaire on a sample of 81 people was 0.943, which indicates that the questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)” has internal consistency and all questions of the methodology reveal a single construct. We obtained the following Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients for the questionnaire scales, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of calculation of Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients for the scales of the questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)”

Scales	Sub-items	Cronbach's Alpha criterion
Stereotypes about sexuality	1, 4, 5, 12, 17, 21	0.857
Sexual behavior	6, 8, 9, 15, 18, 24	0.865
Sexual health	3, 11, 14, 16, 20, 22	0.787
Attitude to the body	2, 7, 10, 13, 19, 23	0.739
Sexual activity	25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30	0.764

To assess *content validity*, we applied the expert judgment method. The expert commission consisted of 8 persons: scientists with doctoral and habilitate doctorate degrees in psychology, medicine, certified sexologists and psychotherapists from the Republic of Moldova and Israel. As a result, we obtained conclusions in which experts highly appreciated the questionnaire and confirmed the possibility of its application to a sample of people aged 60+.

The reliability of the methodology “Sexuality in older people (60+)” was determined based on assessing the homogeneity (homogeneity) of the questionnaire using the method of ‘splitting’ and using the retest method. The obtained Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient was 0.912, which is a high value and indicates a high level of homogeneity of the methodology. To determine the retest reliability, we conducted a re-diagnosis 3 months after the initial diagnosis. The obtained correlation coefficient between the first and the second examination allows us to judge about the stability of the results of the methodology, and the correlation coefficient should not be lower than 0.80. Table 2. presents Spearman's correlation coefficients (test-retest) for the scales of the questionnaire and the total index.

Table 2. Results of calculation of Spearman's correlation coefficient (test-retest)

Scales	Correlation coefficient	Significance level
Stereotypes about sexuality	0.912	$p \leq 0.05$
Sexual behavior	0.952	$p \leq 0.05$
Sexual health	0.96	$p \leq 0.05$
Attitude to the body	0.933	$p \leq 0.05$
Sexual activity	0.927	$p \leq 0.05$
General sexuality	0.975	$p \leq 0.05$

Analyzing the obtained results, we can conclude that the questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)” has high retest reliability, the results of the methodology are stable and are not subject to random changes over time.

2. To investigate **the peculiarities of the sexuality of elderly people**, we conducted diagnostics with the help of the author's questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)”, which allows us to determine both the general level of sexuality and the peculiarities of this phenomenon, manifested in such scales as stereotypes about sexuality, sexual behavior, sexual health and attitude to the body. Evaluating the presented results, we can conclude that sexuality in old age is still a relevant area of life [41]. We found that more than half of the respondents are characterized by an average level of general sexuality (52,7% of the total sample), in addition, almost one-third of the elderly (31,1%) have a high level of sexuality. The average index of general sexuality in the sample was 3,51 (standard error 0.068, standard deviation 0.840), which indicates that sexuality in old age is not completely lost, this sphere still remains significant. The analysis of the percentage ratio of the levels of expression of the results on the scales of the questionnaire is presented in Figure 1.

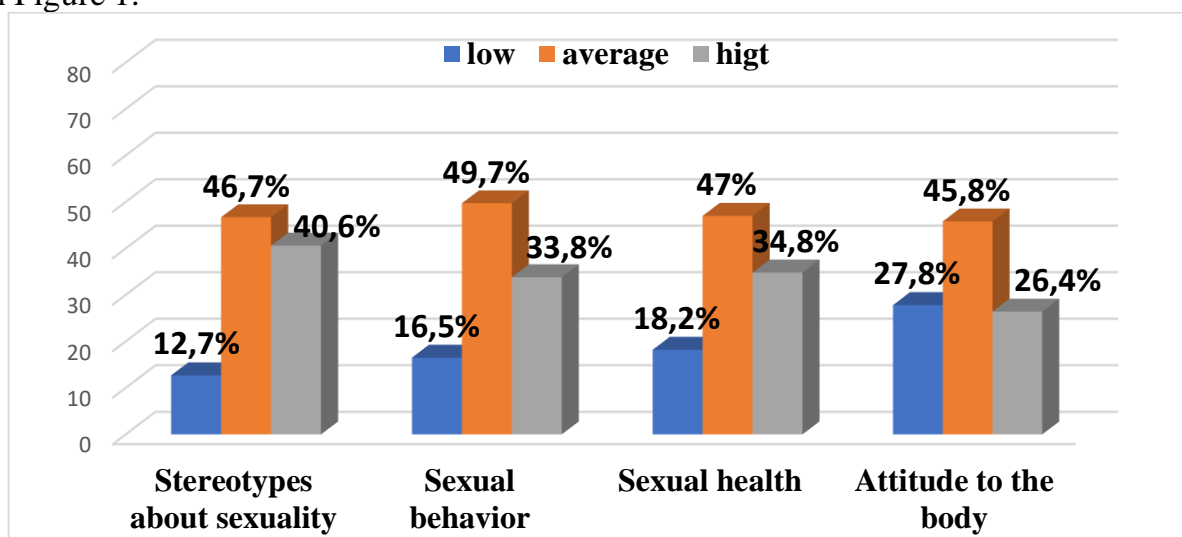


Fig. 1. Percentage ratio of indicators on the scales of the questionnaire “Sexuality in older people (60+)” (in the total sample)

The results of the questionnaire on the scale *stereotypes about sexuality* showed that more than a third of respondents (40,6%) have positive stereotypes about sexual life in old age, they believe that sex is important not only for the young but also for their age group and they do not see obstacles on the part of other people or society as a whole to express their own sexuality. Negative stereotypes about sexuality are characteristic of only 12,7% of the older people who took part in the study, which indicates a significant level of dependence of the respondent's opinion about sexuality on stereotypes, and public discourse; which in turn may inhibit the expression of the respondent's sexuality.

The results obtained on the *sexual behavior* scale of the author's questionnaire allow us to conclude that one-third of the respondents (33,8%) demonstrate high scores on this scale, i.e. they consider themselves sexually attractive and sexually active, sexual relations are acceptable and desirable for them. At the same time, they assess their sexual life as successful and are open to using various sexual techniques if necessary. A low score on this subscale is characteristic of 16,7% of respondents, who demonstrate their dissatisfaction with their sexual life or lack thereof, as well as difficulty in establishing contact with a potential partner. Almost half of the sample (49,7%) show an average level of sexual behavior, thus they are not against sexual relations at this age, but they may face certain difficulties, such as lack of a partner or poor health, but they still have the desire to engage in sexual and romantic relationships.

Analyzing the results of the questionnaire on the *sexual health* scale, it should be noted that one-third of the respondents have a high level of sexual health (34,8%) despite the fact that with age there are physiological changes in the human body that directly affect sexual activity. According to our survey data, 18,2% of respondents have some health problems that hinder sexual activity, which is a rather low percentage; perhaps the level of life and medicine in the country where the respondents live plays a major role here [40].

Exploring the results for the *attitude to the body* indicator, we see a slight decrease in positive attitudes towards the body among older people: 27,8% of respondents indicate that they are dissatisfied with their body and consider it unattractive. However, 45,8% of older people in our sample have a moderate and 26,4% have a positive attitude towards their bodies, i.e. they evaluate positively the possibility of sexual contact, are ready to accept compliments and participate in flirting.

Referring to the results of comparing the characteristics of sexuality among elderly individuals of *different age groups*, we can observe a quite expected tendency of decreasing levels of sexuality across all scales of the questionnaire with age. Statistical analysis using one factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the presence of significant differences on all scales of the questionnaire: *sexual behavior* ($F=10.70$, $p=0$); *sexual health* ($F=7.90$, $p\leq 0.01$); *attitude to the body* ($F=7.20$, $p\leq 0.05$). It is important to note that *sexual stereotypes* in representatives of all studied groups are at a high level, and the group of people aged 80 and above has higher indicators than in other groups ($F=5.64$, $p\leq 0.01$), which may be due to the revision of values at this age and the analysis of their lives and the emergence of regrets about what was not done at a young age.

Student's t-test for independent samples was used to identify differences between *men and women*. The obtained results show that there are significant differences between men and women on scales such as *stereotypes about sexuality* ($t=-5.468$, $p\leq 0,001$), *sexual behavior* ($t=-6.931$, $p=0$), *sexual health* ($t=-2.478$, $p\leq 0.05$), and *general level of sexuality* ($t=-6.782$, $p=0$). Comparing the obtained differences, it can be noted that elderly men have higher scores on the indicated scales of the questionnaire and the general level of sexuality than women of the same age. Also, it is noticed that there is a difference between the frequency of sexual activity of men and women in all age groups, namely men are more active. What is problematic for older people is not their state of health, but their aging body, while for a woman it is more important how she looks, she is afraid of criticism from her partner, and for men the opportunity to have an active sex life is more important than her well-being [45].

The data obtained as a result of the calculation depending on *the level of education* indicate that there are no differences in the level of sexuality of older people depending on their level of education. We assume the need to conduct research on this issue on a larger sample, as well as on a sample of respondents of different age groups.

Summarizing the obtained data on the existence of differences in the peculiarities of sexuality of older people depending on their *marital status*, it can be noted that older people who are divorced have higher scores in all parameters. At the same time, elderly people who have lost their spouses show less interest in the sexual sphere of life. Statistical analysis (ANOVA) showed that married and divorced elderly have more active sexual behavior ($F=6.675$, $p\leq 0.05$) than their widowed peers and are more concerned about their sexual health ($F=4.726$, $p\leq 0.05$). The loss of a regular sexual partner in old age often leads to the cessation of sexual activity. In contrast, the experience of long-term relationships between partners allows for a variety of sexual expression opportunities to be actualized in old age.

3. One of the aims of our study was to investigate the **degree of sexual activity in old age** [46]. For this purpose, the questionnaire asked the respondents questions aimed at finding out whether the respondent had a sexual partner and how often they had sex. According to the results, 108 people or 53,4% of the total number of respondents considered themselves *sexually active*, including 44 women (41,1% of the total number of women) and 64 men (67,3% of the total number of men). 94 people or 46,6 percent of respondents do not consider themselves sexually active, the majority of whom are women: 58,9 percent of the total number of women (63 women) and 32,7 percent (31 men).

Considering the changes in sexual activity by *age groups*, it should be noted that there is a tendency for sexual activity to decrease from earlier to later ages: 60-69 years – 77,2 percent; 70-79 years – 35,4 percent; 80 years and older – 26,1 percent. This trend is expected since with age there are objective physiological changes in the human body, and often there is a change in family status (people become widows or widowers). Despite this, it should be noted that at the age of 80+, more than a quarter of respondents consider themselves sexually active people; and in the age group of 60-69 years more than 77,2%, which confirms our theoretical assumptions about the importance of the topic under study for the elderly in contrast to the existing stereotypical ideas about old age and the scantiness of the sexual sphere of the elderly.

Among *married respondents*, 62,5 percent are sexually active; among *divorced and single respondents*, 68,2 percent consider themselves sexually active, and the least active are respondents who are *widowed*, 16,3 percent. This situation is probably due to the fact that widows and widowers remain ‘faithful’ to their spouses. Partly because there is an idealization of the object after its loss, the one hand. On the other hand, self-confidence as a sexual object tends to decline with age, and with it the libido. Another reason may be the presence of difficulties at the beginning of a new intimate relationship, among which are the following: meeting a new partner after widowhood may be psychologically difficult; at the beginning of a relationship with a new partner, sexual function may be strongly reduced due to psychological fears and anxiety; it takes time to get used to each other.

It was also particularly important for us to find out data on the *frequency of sex* (survey question ‘*How often do you have sex (once a month or more often)?*’). The obtained data confirmed the existence of a difference between the frequency of sexual activity of *men* and *women* in all age groups, namely men are more active. There is also a tendency for the frequency of sexual activity to decrease with the age of the respondents (84,2 percent of men and 71,1 percent of women 60-69 years old and 81,3 percent and 43,7 percent respectively in the age group 70-79 years old). Despite a noticeable decrease in activity in the age category 80 and above, the activity remains quite high, namely, every second male respondent and every third woman from this age category consider themselves sexually active, which tells us about the significance and importance of sexual life for older people.

Analyzing the obtained data of answers to the question about *the importance of full sexual intercourse with penetration*, it can be noted that its importance remains the same for men of any age group, while for women it decreases with age and becomes less attractive. The success of sexual life in old age largely depends on how ready the partners are for it. Firstly, older people lack the culture of discussing sexual relationships, and talking about their desires and their dissatisfaction. Second, men often equate penetrative sex with sexual relationships in general and are not willing to engage in other kinds of sexual practices. Stereotypes that penetrative sex is the only possible sexual activity, without which intimate relationships are impossible, condemn older people to loneliness.

Overestimation of the importance of penetrative sex in old age leads to insecurity and loss of the meaning of sexuality. Expanding the repertoire of lovemaking activities helps to maintain and increase pleasure [41]. Based on the results obtained in our study, we believe that for this age group, it is advisable to conduct informational seminars, webinars, and trainings on the topic of peculiarities of sexuality and sexual life in old age.

We also considered it important to find out from the *participants of the experiment whether they are currently sexually active*; if not, at what age they stopped sexual activity, and, if possible, we asked them to indicate the reason. Thus, 61,5 % stopped sexual activity due to the absence of a partner. The main reasons for cessation of sexual activity were: the absence of a partner due to divorce or death of a spouse and health condition (their own or their partner's). None of the respondents linked sexual cessation directly to age but emphasized the absence of a sexual partner or deterioration in health, which can occur at any age. Sexual activity is possible at any age, and many remain sexually active even after the age of 80, successfully adapting to age-related physiological changes. Many older couples report that sex life definitely improves with age, attributing this to having the ability to relax and have sex for longer [13]. In addition, at older ages, people tend to experience less stress related to careers, children, and professional achievements; older partners have more time to socialize with each other. Thus, we can say that with age there is a peculiar transition of the quantity of sexual relations into quality.

4. To study **psychological well-being**, we used the questionnaire “Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being” in the adaptation of Н.Н. Лепешинский. According to the results of the calculation of the *integral index*, the psychological well-being of elderly people in our sample is at the average level of 144 people (71,3%), at a low level of 36 people (17,8%) and 22 people (10,9%) have a high level of psychological well-being. The average level of well-being assumes a positive attitude to one's personality, a trusting, open attitude to the world, its orderliness and laws; a constructive attitude to one's own past and future; a constructive attitude to problems, the desire for self-determination, the priority of internal standards; personal growth is felt and realized through the prism of close, trusting relationships with others [44].

Let us further consider the indicators by levels of expression of indicators of psychological well-being in the total sample of respondents. The results are clearly presented in Figure 2.

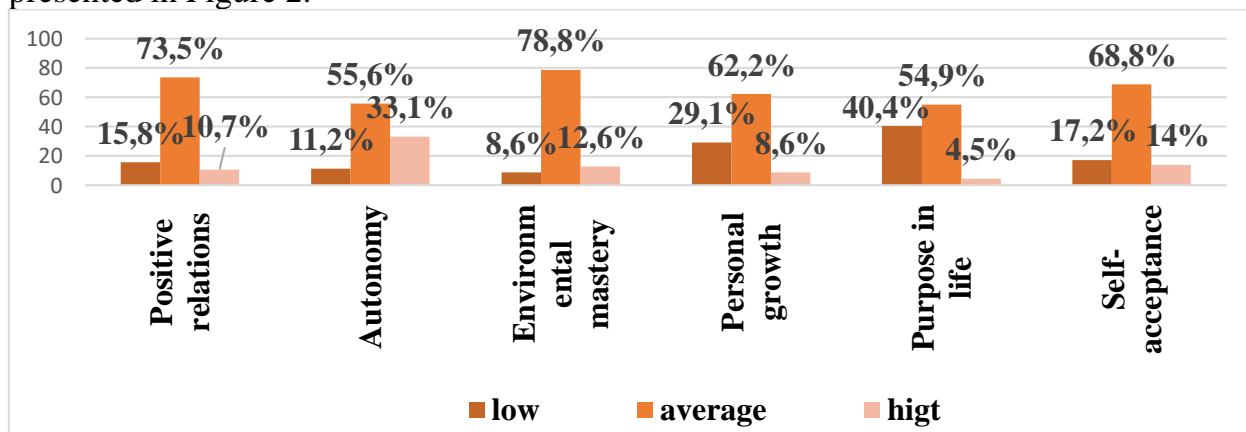


Fig. 2. Ratio of expression of psychological well-being scales in the total sample (in %)

Analyzing the obtained results, it can be noted that in old age the average level of well-being prevails on all scales. However, 40,4% of respondents have a low level on the *purpose in life scale*, which indicates that older people experience a sense of

meaninglessness in their lives, do not see the prospects of their lives in the future, and try not to plan their future. At the same time, only 4,5 percent of older people who participated in the study experience a sense of meaningfulness of existence, the value of what has happened in the past, is happening in the present, and will happen in the future. Almost a third of respondents (29,1%) demonstrate a low level on the *personal growth scale*, believing that personal growth is impossible for them for some reason.

This, in turn, can lead to feelings of boredom, stagnation, and lack of faith in their abilities to change, and master new skills and abilities, which reduces interest in life. And only 8,6 percent of older people show a desire to develop, learn, perceive new things, and feel their own progress. According to the results of our study, one-third of the sample (33,1%) have high *autonomy*, i.e. they are able to be independent, are not afraid to oppose their opinion to the opinion of the majority, can afford unconventional thinking and behavior, and evaluate themselves based on their own preferences. The lack of sufficient level of autonomy is demonstrated by 11,2%, which leads to conformism, and excessive dependence on the opinion of others.

Interpreting the data obtained as a result of the calculation in *different age groups*, it can be noted that a significant decrease with age occurs on the scale *purpose in life scale* ($F=10.895$, $p=0$): in the age group of 80 and older, the indicators on this scale are significantly lower than in the first two groups. Significant results are also observed for the *environmental mastery scale* ($F=5.661$, $p\leq 0.05$). However, it can be noticed that the decrease in indicators is not uniform, but on the contrary, by the age of 80, elderly people sharply begin to feel that they are losing control over their environment. This may be due to the cessation of professional activities, deterioration of health, and the inability to do without assistance due to these changes. The reduction of goals in life in the age subgroup 80+ affects the indicators of *personal growth* ($F=3.681$, $p\leq 0.05$), and the *general level of psychological well-being* decreases ($F=4.767$, $p\leq 0.05$). It should also be noted that with age there is a tendency to decrease the level of self-acceptance, which is associated with the fact that it is difficult for a person to accept the fact of his/her own aging and the associated fact of limitation of the habitual way of life. It should be noted that positive attitudes are characterized by a high level in all age subgroups.

The data obtained as a result of diagnosing psychological well-being in *men and women* allow us to conclude that women have a slightly lower overall *level of psychological well-being* than men; however, these differences are not significant, we can only point to a general trend. There are significant differences between men and women only on the *purpose in life scale* ($t=2.369$, $p\leq 0.05$): men have a higher score on this scale in contrast to women. Probably, women associate their goals in life with children and their life to a greater extent, while for men it is more important to realize their own goals and more often associate their goals with work, which they can continue after retirement.

The data obtained as a result of the calculation indicate that there are no differences in the level of psychological well-being of older people depending on their *marital status*. This is probably due to the fact that in the process of aging, there is a gradual narrowing of the surrounding world with which elderly and senile people interact, the degree of social activity decreases, there is a change of roles in family life, and many people become widows or widowers. Adult children play a crucial role in the successful aging of parents, providing a sense of security and support, especially in the presence of elderly parents with illnesses and increasing physical weakness in the process of aging.

Statistical analysis of the peculiarities of psychological well-being in elderly people depending on the *level of education* has shown that respondents with higher education

have a differently higher level of psychological well-being on all scales than those with only secondary education. However, statistically significant differences were revealed only for three scales of the questionnaire. In particular, older adults with higher education are more likely to have a *positive relations with others* ($t=2.021$, $p\leq 0.05$), more pronounced *purpose in life* ($t=2.140$, $p\leq 0.05$), and higher *overall psychological well-being* ($t=2.210$, $p\leq 0.05$) than older adults with secondary education. It is likely that the perception of success and self-worth increases with higher education.

5. To test our hypothesis about the existence of a **relationship between sexuality and psychological well-being in old age**, we turn to statistical analysis of the data obtained as a result of the study [47]. As a result of the correlation analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient, several moderately positive correlations of psychological well-being and sexuality indicators were revealed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of correlation analysis of indicators of sexuality and psychological well-being (in the total sample)

		Positive relations with others	Autonomy	Environmental mastery	Personal growth	Purpose in life	Self-acceptance
Stereotypes about sexuality	r	0,001	0,092	0,171	0,092	0,245	0,127
	p	0,993	0,213	0,05	0,213	0,01	0,071
Sexual behavior	r	-0,059	0,066	0,134	0,167	0,288	0,162
	p	0,402	0,356	0,079	0,05	0,00	0,135
Sexual health	r	-0,051	-0,011	0,040	0,301	0,272	0,062
	p	0,537	0,895	0,624	0,05	0,00	0,452
Attitude to the body	r	0,005	0,109	0,162	0,194	0,275	0,067
	p	0,956	0,184	0,05	0,01	0,00	0,289
General sexuality	r	-0,040	0,082	0,169	0,193	0,305	0,135
	p	0,623	0,261	0,05	0,01	0,00	0,075

Analyzing the results obtained, we can note the presence of a moderate positive relationship between *overall sexuality* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.305$, $p\leq 0.01$), *sexual health* and *personal growth* ($r=0.301$, $p\leq 0.05$). In other parameters, there is a weak positive relationship. For example, between the scale of *stereotypes about sexuality* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.245$, $p\leq 0.05$); between the scale of *sexual behavior* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.288$, $p\leq 0.05$); *sexual health*, which is positively interrelated with the scale of *purpose in life* ($r=0.272$, $p\leq 0.05$).

Nevertheless, the existence of a correlation allows us to conclude that older people's positive perceptions of sexuality contribute to the maintenance of their competencies in managing their environment, controlling all external activities, and making effective use of opportunities that are suitable for meeting personal needs and achieving goals. At the same time, they are noted to have a purpose in life and a sense of direction; they believe that past and present lives have meaning; hold beliefs that are sources of meaning in life; and have intentions and goals for life.

Next, let us consider the features of the relationship between sexuality and psychological well-being depending on gender; age; marital status; level of education; and sexual activity.

➤ **Gender.** Considering gender as a criterion for analysis, we found that in the group of women we did not identify significant relationships between sexuality and the

parameters of psychological well-being. Earlier we found that differences in the subjective feeling of psychological well-being between men and women are present only for one parameter of *purpose in life*, at the same time we found significant differences in the level and manifestation of sexuality between men and women. The absence of significant interrelations between the studied parameters in the group of women, in our opinion, is due to the fact that men are more sexually active and perceive the sexual sphere of life as important and quite natural at this age, unlike women.

The results of correlation analysis in the group of men indicate that they have a moderate positive correlation between the scales of *personal growth* and *purpose in life* and such parameters of sexuality as *stereotypes about sexuality* ($r=0.324$, $p\leq 0.01$ and $r=0.367$, $p=0$), *sexual behavior* ($r=0.247$, $p\leq 0.01$ and $r=0.357$, $p=0$) and *body attitudes* ($r=0.200$, $p\leq 0.05$ and $r=0.331$, $p=0$). Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the more satisfied older women are with all aspects of their sexuality, the more they seek personal growth and purpose in their lives. Conversely, older women who have not lost the meaning of their lives and continue to self-actualize are more interested in the sexual sphere of their lives.

➤ **Age.** Examining the statistical data in **group 1** (60-69 years old), moderate positive correlations were found between *stereotypes about sexuality* and such scales of the psychological well-being questionnaire as *positive relations with others* ($r=0.381$, $p\leq 0.01$), *personal growth* ($r=0.394$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *purpose in life* ($r=0.301$, $p\leq 0.05$), as well as between *integral level* ($r=0.311$, $p\leq 0.01$). Thus, the more positive ideas about sexuality there are in the minds of people in this age group, the more they tend to have positive relationships with others and have their own goals in life. It is also worth noting that a positive perception of one's body and, at the same time, the general manifestation of sexuality have a positive effect on personal growth and overall psychological well-being.

In group 2 (70-79 years old), moderate relationships were found between *the body attitude* parameter and such scales of psychological well-being as *environmental management* ($r=0.298$, $p\leq 0.05$), *personal growth* ($r=0.284$, $p\leq 0.05$) and *purpose in life* ($r=0.302$, $p\leq 0.05$). The result indicates that older people in this age group who have a positive attitude towards their bodies and accept its age-related changes feel that they can develop and find new goals in life, manage the environment, and control circumstances.

In age group 3 (80 years and older), we noted a moderate positive relationship between *sexual behavior* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.352$, $p\leq 0.01$), and *purpose in life* were positively correlated with *overall sexuality* ($r=0.303$, $p\leq 0.05$). Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that older people in this age group who demonstrate more active sexual behavior continue to perceive themselves as “growing up”, are still open to new experiences and continue to make plans for life.

Conversely, older people who have not lost their purpose in life and continue to realize themselves are also more interested in the sexual sphere of their lives. It should be noted that in all three groups, relationships were found between the manifestations of sexuality and life goals and personal growth. Age discrimination is often associated with poor health, and health perceptions can affect body perception, which affects areas of activity and reduces a person's activity, including sexual activity. Perceived external “decrepitude”, in turn, can contribute to a decrease in self-esteem, loss of self-confidence, loss of goals, meaning in life, and limit personal growth.

➤ **Marital status.** Analyzing the correlations between the features of sexuality and psychological well-being depending on the marital status of the elderly, we found the

following relationships, which we will describe by groups: widows/widowers, married, divorced/ single.

Widows/widowers. In this group, it was found that the more positive attitudes towards sex (*sexuality stereotypes* scale) they have, the higher their level of *personal growth* ($r=0.294$, $p\leq 0.05$), *purpose in life* ($r=0.398$, $p\leq 0.01$), and *integral level of well-being* ($r=0.332$, $p\leq 0.01$). In addition, the higher the level of *sexual health* among widows/widowers, the higher their level of *personal growth* ($r=0.297$, $p\leq 0.05$), *purpose in life* ($r=0.419$, $p=0.01$), and *integral level of well-being* ($r=0.304$, $p\leq 0.05$). Also, the more positive the widowed elderly person's *attitude toward the body*, the higher their scores on the *purpose in life* scale ($r=0.401$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *integral level of well-being* ($r=0.341$, $p\leq 0.01$). It is also noteworthy that the more pronounced *general sexuality* is in the widowed elderly, the more pronounced *purpose in life* ($r=0.461$, $p\leq 0.01$) are. It can be assumed that this group of older people have expectations that it is still possible to recover their sexual life and this idea helps them to feel more psychologically well. Conversely, more psychologically well people may have different attitudes towards their sexual health, their bodies, have positive stereotypes about sexuality, and therefore sexual life remains meaningful for them.

Married. This group of respondents did not reveal moderate or strong correlations. We can note the presence of some trends. For example, the scale *sexuality stereotypes* correlated with *environmental mastery* scale ($r=0.283$ at $p\leq 0.01$); scale *sexual behavior* correlated with *environmental mastery* scale ($r=0.272$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *purpose in life* ($r=0.278$, $p\leq 0.01$) scales. It is interesting to note the fact that in this category such an *indicator of psychological well-being* as *environmental management* ($r=0.270$, $p\leq 0.01$) has the most correlations with indicators of sexuality. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that over the years the frequency and passion of sexual relations between spouses decreases, but at the same time, as a rule, sexual relations become more qualitative, satisfying, when there comes a period of true intimacy between spouses. This becomes possible thanks to communication, finding compromises, i.e. one of the most closed and intimate spheres can be controlled and managed, and this experience is transferred to the management of other spheres of life.

Divorced/single - showing a moderate positive relationship between *purpose in life* and *stereotypes about sexuality* ($r=0,368$, $p\leq 0,05$) as well as the *general level of sexuality* ($r=0,378$, $p\leq 0,05$). It is likely that divorce has affected a person's ideas about their sex life and they are reluctant to accept the negative stereotypes available in society about older people's sexuality.

Analyzing the results depending on marital status, we note that stereotypes about sexuality and sexual behavior are significantly correlated with such parameters of psychological well-being as personal growth and goals in life in all groups. Undoubtedly, marital status influences the size and quality of social contacts. At the same time, elderly people, tending to have fewer social contacts, may well strive for qualitatively closer relationships, which include various kinds of sexual activity, which in turn makes life richer, and fuller, and has a beneficial effect on other spheres of activity (physical, mental, social, labor, etc.), and the availability of activities (housework, work, involvement in the upbringing of grandchildren, etc.) determines goals in life and provides opportunities for personal growth.

➤ **Level of education.** Elderly people with *higher education* show moderate positive correlations between *sexual stereotypes* and such scales of the psychological well-being questionnaire as *environmental mastery* ($r=0.276$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *purpose in life*

($r=0.326$, $p\leq 0.01$), as well as the *integral level of psychological well-being* ($r=0.272$, $p\leq 0.01$). In addition, they demonstrate positive relationships between *sexual behavior* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.351$, $p\leq 0.01$). Also, positive relationships were observed between *sexual health* and *purpose in life* ($r=0.303$, $p=0.01$). The presence of higher education, in our opinion, influenced the critical attitude and analysis of the stereotypes existing in society about the sexuality of older people, which in turn had a positive impact on the sexuality and sexual life of people in this category.

Older adults with secondary education show a moderate negative relationship between *sexual health* and *autonomy* ($r=-0.318$, $p\leq 0.05$), i.e. the higher their level of sexual health, the less independent they feel. In our opinion, this may be due to the fact that the environment of these people do not share the position of sexual activity in old age, do not accept the sexual activity of older people. The acceptance and availability of a supportive environment becomes significant for the elderly, they need help and support.

➤ **Sexual activity.** Evaluating the results of statistical processing of the relationship between the peculiarities of sexuality and the psychological well-being of older people depending on the degree of their sexual activity, we can note that older ***people who are sexually active*** at the time of the study, demonstrate a positive relationship between the *sexual behavior* and *purpose in life* scale ($r=0.328$, $p\leq 0.01$), *stereotypes about sexuality* in turn are also positively correlated with *personal growth* ($r=0.334$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *purpose in life* ($r=0.269$, $p\leq 0.05$), and *integral level of psychological well-being* correlated with *purpose in life* scale ($r=0.343$, $p\leq 0.01$), *personal growth* ($r=0.273$, $p\leq 0.05$) and *integral index of psychological well-being* ($r=0.273$, $p\leq 0.05$).

In turn, in contrast to sexually active older people, in those who are ***not sexually active***, we found moderate positive correlations between *stereotypes about sexuality* and *environmental mastery* ($r=0.318$, $p\leq 0.01$), *personal growth* ($r=0.321$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *integral level of psychological well-being* ($r=0.350$, $p\leq 0.01$). They also showed a positive correlation between *sexual health* and *personal growth* ($r=0.336$, $p\leq 0.01$). It should also be noted that the *general level of sexuality* is positively correlated with such scales as *personal growth* ($r=0.363$, $p\leq 0.01$), *purpose in life* ($r=0.344$, $p\leq 0.01$) and *integral index of psychological well-being* ($r=0.307$, $p\leq 0.01$). Analyzing the results obtained, it can be concluded that psychological well-being and sexuality are positively interrelated regardless of the sexual activity of older people. However, there are differences in the features of these relationships. Thus, it can be noted that sexuality and its components are interrelated with the goals in life of one and the other part of the respondents. In sexually active older people, psychological well-being is associated with all scales of sexuality except sexual health, unlike those who are not sexually active. At the same time, the latter can note the relationship between stereotypes about sexuality and self-acceptance, as well as sexual health - goals in life and personal growth [44].

The results of the study, obtained during the ascertaining experiment aimed at studying the characteristics of sexuality and psychological well-being of older people, allow us to draw the following **conclusions**: sexuality in old age is not completely lost; older people do not associate the cessation of sexual life directly with age, but focus on the absence of a sexual partner or deterioration in health, which can occur at any age; sexual relations in old age are acceptable for both men and women; the importance of sexual intercourse with penetration remains the same for any age group, but men more often equate penetrative sex with sexual relations in general and are not ready to participate in other types of practices; in old age, an average level of psychological well-being prevails, expressed in a positive attitude to themselves, a trusting attitude to the world, its orderliness

and laws; older people who demonstrate more active sexual behavior have a higher level of psychological well-being, a sense of continuous development, are open to new experiences, experience a sense of realization of their potential, observe improvements in themselves, change in accordance with their own knowledge and achievements.

In the third chapter, *Improving of Psychological Well-being in Older Age through the Formation of Positive Sexual Images* presents the methodological basis of the formative experiment, as well as the results of implementing and analyzing the effectiveness of the developed program.

Using theoretical data on the one hand and empirical data on the other, we developed a training program **aimed** at developing positive attitudes towards sexuality in old age, helping to improve the psychological well-being of older people.

The **hypothesis** of the formative experiment posits that a targeted intervention to reshape perceptions of sexuality, in order to form a positive image of sexuality, contributes to enhancing the psychological well-being of older adults.

The *experimental group* comprised 16 cognitively intact, heterosexual older adults living in Israel (11 women and 5 men) from three age subgroups, with a mean age of 72,6 years.

The developed training program "Sexuality in old age" [42] consists of three blocks, each designed to address the following training *objectives*: expanding knowledge about the peculiarities of sexual health in old age; broadening understanding of psychological well-being; fostering self-discovery and exploration of one's inner world; forming a positive body image in old age; and expanding concepts of sexual behavior and expressions of sexuality in old age.

The training program involves 10 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, conducted once a week.

In order to analyze the effect of the training intervention, a repeated diagnostic examination of the participants of the experimental program was carried out and the results obtained were compared with the previous ones. Analyzing the quantitative results of the questionnaire "Sexuality of the older people (60+)" before and after the experiment, it can be noted that in the experimental group there were positive changes in the level of expression of the studied parameter.

Analyzing the quantitative results of the "*Sexuality in older people (60+)*" questionnaire before and after the experiment, it is evident that the experimental group exhibited positive changes in the level of the studied parameters.

The average scores for all scales of the questionnaire were higher after the experiment. The most significant changes occurred on the *stereotypes about sexuality* scale ($t=-5.084$, $p=0$). As part of the training, older people had the opportunity to expand their ideas about their own sexuality and reduce the influence of negative stereotypes regarding sexual behavior in old age. Additionally, significant improvements were observed on the *sexual health* scale ($t=-6.333$, $p=0$). At the same time, we cannot claim that the health of the elderly in general medical terms has improved, but attitudes towards this topic have changed. Positive dynamics were also noted on the *sexual behavior* scale ($t=-6.928$, $p=0$), indicating that with age, sexual behavior shifts from genital to extragenital forms, emphasizing intimacy, communication, and trust over the sexual act itself. Furthermore, significant positive changes occurred on the *attitude to the body* scale ($t=-3.563$, $p\leq 0.05$), suggesting that the training helped participants cope with stereotypes about physicality in old age and accept age-related body changes.

Let us consider the results of the questionnaire “*Riffe Psychological Well-Being Scale*” in the experimental group before and after the experiment.

The test of significance of observed differences, carried out with the help of Student's T-criterion, showed that on all scales of the questionnaire the differences before and after the training in the experimental group were significant. We can note that the level of *personal growth* scale significantly increased in elderly people ($t=-3.232$, $p\leq 0.01$), which indicates that the training participants felt the strength and desire to develop and gain new experience. Additionally, new *purpose in life* emerged ($t=-2.717$, $p\leq 0.05$), suggesting that the training allowed participants to view their lives from a new perspective, recognizing potential rather than lost opportunities. Participation in the training allowed them to look at their own lives in a new way, to see not only lost opportunities but also potential. New ways of building relationships with a partner and dealing with their own sexuality allowed older people to reflect on their experience and build new strategies for living. This is also reflected in new possibilities to *manage the environment* ($t=-3.058$, $p\leq 0.01$): older people felt that they could change the existing order of their lives for the better and could create an environment suitable to fulfil their personal needs. It can also be noted that after participating in the training program, older people increased the results on the self-acceptance scale ($t=-2.324$, $p\leq 0.05$), indicating that the work on the formation of a positive image of sexuality affected the general self-concept [42].

Summarizing the results of the formative experiment, we can state the following: the targeted impact on the idea of sexuality contributes to the improvement of the level of psychological well-being of older people; reducing the taboo of the topic of sexuality in old age contributes to the improvement of psychological well-being in older people; obtaining modern knowledge about sexuality and sexual health is an inalienable right of the elderly themselves, and the implementation of this right, in the end, will also lead to an improvement in the level of psychological well-being of the elderly.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Theoretical analysis of the literature and the results of the empirical and formative experiments allowed us to formulate the following **conclusions**:

1. Old age and aging represent not only a period of declining physiological functions but also a significant phase in a modern individual's life, rich in time and opportunities, where it is possible and necessary to maintain psychological health and well-being. Healthy aging involves developing and maintaining the functional capabilities required for a good quality of life in old age.

2. In modern society, sexuality, intimacy, and sexual relationships are central to personal life and constitute a fundamental human need and right. Sexual health is integral to overall health and well-being throughout life. While sexual activity declines with age, many older adults remain sexually active well into old age, adapting to age-related physical changes to continue enjoying sexual activity.

3. Psychological well-being is a crucial indicator of an individual's orientation towards achieving the main components of positive functioning, subjectively expressed as happiness and satisfaction with oneself and life. In old age, psychological well-being depends on health status, life path assessment, internal standards, beliefs, support from significant others, and the ability to function effectively in changed social conditions.

4. Older men and women differ in their understanding and expression of sexuality. Older men are more influenced by stereotypes about sexuality, exhibit more relaxed sexual behavior, and are more concerned about their sexual health compared to women of the same age. Men are also more likely to be sexually active, a trend consistent across all age subgroups. Older women tend to establish positive relationships more frequently than older men. However, older men demonstrate higher levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance compared to older women.

5. Elderly people of the older age subgroup 80+ are less inclined to manage their environment, there is a sharp reduction in goals in life and a decrease in the overall level of psychological well-being.

6. Older people who exhibit more active sexual behavior have a sense of ongoing development, perceive themselves as 'growing' and self-actualizing, are open to new experiences, experience a sense of fulfilment of their potential, see improvements in themselves and their actions over time; change in line with their own learning and achievements. A similar trend is seen in attitudes towards the body: older people who are positive about their bodies and accept their body changes feel they can manage their environment, control their circumstances, develop and find new goals in life.

7. Changing attitudes to sexuality in old age can be promoted by psychological training, built on the principles of integrative approach to the problems of psychosexual culture and organically connected with such basic concepts, sexuality, attitude to the body, sexual health, sexual behavior and legitimization of sexuality in old age (stereotypes about sexuality). The formation of a positive image of sexuality contributes to increasing the level of psychological well-being of older people.

The study's findings confirm the hypotheses, theoretical, and practical significance of our work. Experimentally, we demonstrated that sexuality is a factor of psychological well-being in old age, proposed methods for researching the peculiarities of sexuality in old age, and developed a training program to form a positive image of sexuality.

The results obtained, which contribute to the solution of an important scientific problem, consist in establishing the role of sexuality as a factor in the psychological well-being of older people; in the development and validation of the questionnaire "Sexuality

of older people (60+)”; in the development and implementation of a training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age.

The novelty and scientific originality of the research results. This research is a multidisciplinary examination of the issues of old age and aging at the socio-psychological level, integrating psychological, medical, philosophical, sociological, and geriatric perspectives. It has been established that sexuality in old age remains significant and is not entirely lost. The study demonstrates that more active sexual behavior in old age correlates with a more active life stance and a higher level of psychological well-being, with key factors being a positive attitude towards one's body and the absence of stereotypes about elderly sexual behavior. The diagnostic method for studying the peculiarities of sexuality in old age has been introduced into research practice. A new model of psychological support for the elderly, aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age.

The theoretical significance of the research resides in expanding the scientific understanding of the sexuality of elderly individuals and its relationship with their subjective experience of psychological well-being. This study productively integrates key theories concerning aging and old age from psychology, medicine, philosophy, sociology, and gerontology, specifically applied to the sexual domain. The findings and conclusions update existing theoretical perspectives in general psychology, age psychology, and gerontology regarding the psychological aspects of elderly sexuality as a component of psychological well-being.

The applied value of the research lies in the development, validation and approbation of the questionnaire “Sexuality of older people (60+)”, which gives a quantitative idea of the degree of expression of such aspects as sexual stereotypes in relation to the sexual life of an elderly person, sexual behavior, sexual health, attitude to the body, and the general level of sexuality. And also, in the developed training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age, built in the context of an eclectic approach and using the exercises proposed by the author. These tools can be used by: scientists of various fields of knowledge for further scientific research in the field of sexuality of older people; practitioners in the field of psychological counselling and psychotherapy, family therapy, sexology, specialists of other helping professions working with older people. The results obtained can be used as methodological material in courses on General Psychology, Age Psychology, Gerontology, Sexology, etc.

Based on theoretical insights and practical psychotherapeutic work with older adults, we developed **recommendations** for older adults, specialists in various helping professions and public authorities:

➤ *For older adults:* awareness that sexuality and sexual health are integral to health, well-being and social functioning in older age; a change in stereotypical ideas about sexual activity, in general, and sexuality in old age, in particular; legitimize this issue for yourself, your partner and, if necessary, find a way to receive quality professional help; it is necessary to learn and implement new sexual and tactile practices; weakening of social control on the part of relatives over the sexual behavior of older people.

➤ *For specialists in helping professions:* completion of additional education on issues of gerontology, features of the socio-psychological development of older people; use of information on prevention and promotion of healthy lifestyles for older people; receiving additional training on sexual activity and sexual behavior in older age;

educational activities and informing relatives of older people about the characteristics of the physical and mental health of older people.

➤ *For public authorities (legislative bodies, relevant Ministries, social protection authorities, etc.):* development of geriatric service as a comprehensive interdepartmental system for providing individual medical, socio-psychological services to older people based on an assessment of needs and needs; organization of advanced training courses for specialists working with the elderly on issues related to the characteristics of physiological, social and psychological development in old age; creating information content about sexual health and aging on the Internet; creation of an educational program aimed at attracting the attention of civil society to solving the problems of older people; use of all aspects of the research: theoretical review of scientific literature and training materials on the development of a positive image of sexuality to organize work with older people, to create training programs and advanced training courses for specialists working with older people..

Speaking about *further prospects of studying* the problem of sexuality and psychological well-being in old age, it should be noted that population ageing is becoming a problem of mankind and brings with it unresolved social, economic, medical, cultural problems, the solution of which should contribute to the creation of numerous opportunities for older people in many spheres of life, which will affect the psychological state of a person. This opens up the widest possible scope for the study of sexuality and psychological well-being in the context of a variety of social and personal determinants. Promising directions for further research are: research into the dynamics of changes in attitudes towards sexuality and sexual behavior in people of different age categories; studying the influence of stereotypes about sexuality on people of different ages, genders, cultural and religious communities; development of diagnostic tools taking into account age, cultural, religious and other specifics; studying prevention mechanisms and developing methods of psychological work with emotional and behavioral problems associated with the immature sexuality of the individual. The most important task is the development of methodological support for the training of specialists in the field of psychosexual education and training.

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ADNOTARE

Slavinski Marina. Sexualitatea ca factor al bunăstării psihologice la vârsta a treia. Teză de doctor în psihologie. Chișinău, 2024.

Structura lucrării. Teza constă din adnotări în limbile română, engleză și rusă, cuprins, introducere, trei capitole, concluzii și recomandări, 148 de pagini de text de bază, bibliografie (300 surse) și anexe (5), declarația privind asumarea răspunderii și CV-ul autorului. Lucrarea conține 28 de figuri și 38 de tabele. În baza rezultatelor cercetării au fost publicate 9 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte cheie: vârsta a treia, bunăstarea psihologică, sexualitatea, activitatea sexuală, sănătatea sexuală, comportament sexual, stereotipuri privind sexualitatea.

Scopul cercetării constă în studierea sexualității ca factor al bunăstării psihologice la persoanele de vârsta a treia.

Obiectivele cercetării: analiza abordărilor existente în cunoașterea științifică modernă a problemei bunăstării psihologice, a fenomenului sexualității, a particularităților socio-psihologice ale persoanelor de vârsta a treia; elaborarea și aprobarea unui chestionar de diagnostic destinat studiului sexualității la persoanele de vârsta a treia; identificarea nivelului bunăstării psihologice și particularităților sexualității la persoanele de vârsta a treia; determinarea semnificației sexualității în experiența subiectivă a sentimentului de bunăstare psihologică a persoanelor vârstnice în funcție de factorii socio-biologici; elaborarea, implementarea și evaluarea eficienței unui program de formare menit să îmbunătățească bunăstarea psihologică a persoanelor de vârsta a treia prin formarea unei imagini pozitive a sexualității; formularea concluziilor și recomandărilor pentru persoanele de vârsta a treia, pentru psihologi și specialiști în profesii de asistență, pentru instituții și factori de decizie.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică: lucrarea de față reprezintă un studiu multidisciplinar al problemelor bătrâneții și îmbătrânirii la nivel socio-psihologic, bazat pe integrarea ideilor psihologice, medicale, filosofice, sociologice și geriatrice. În cadrul cercetării sa stabilit că sexualitatea rămâne un domeniu semnificativ al vieții la persoanele de vârsta a treia; sa dovedit că un comportament sexual activ la persoanele vârstnice este însoțit de o poziție de viață activă și de un nivel ridicat de bunăstare psihologică, punctele cheie fiind o atitudine pozitivă față de propriul corp și absența stereotipurilor cu privire la comportamentul sexual la vârsta a treia; a fost introdusă în practica de cercetare o metoda de diagnosticare a particularităților sexualității la persoanele vârstnice; sa propus un nou model de asistență psihologică care vizează îmbunătățirea bunăstării psihologice a persoanelor de vârsta a treia prin formarea unei imagini pozitive a sexualității.

Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea unei probleme științifice importante constau în stabilirea rolului sexualității ca factor al bunăstării psihologice la persoanele de vârsta a treia; în elaborarea și validarea chestionarului „Sexualitatea persoanelor de vârsta a treia (60+)”; în elaborarea unui program de formare menit să îmbunătățească bunăstarea psihologică a persoanelor de vârsta a treia prin formarea unei imagini pozitive a sexualității.

Semnificația teoretică a cercetării rezidă în extinderea ideilor științifice despre sexualitatea persoanelor de vârsta a treia și relația acesteia cu experiența subiectivă a sentimentului de bunăstare psihologică. Lucrarea combină în mod productiv dispozițiile principale privind îmbătrânirea și bătrânețea dezvoltate în psihologie, medicină, filosofie, sociologie și gerontologie precizate în raport cu sfera sexuală. Prevederile și concluziile cercetării permit actualizarea cunoștințelor teoretice existente în psihologia generală, psihologia vârstei, gerontologie cu privire la particularitățile psihologice ale sexualității persoanelor de vârsta a treia ca unul dintre aspectele bunăstării psihologice.

Valoarea aplicativă a lucrării constă în elaborarea, validarea și aprobarea chestionarului „Sexualitatea persoanelor de vârsta a treia (60+)”, care oferă informații cantitative despre gradul de exprimare a unor aspecte ale sexualității precum stereotipurile sexuale în legătură cu viața sexuală a unei persoane de vârsta a treia, comportamentul sexual, sănătatea sexuală, atitudinea față de corp; în elaborarea programului de formare care vizează îmbunătățirea bunăstării psihologice a persoanelor de vârsta a treia prin formarea unei imagini pozitive a sexualității. Aceste instrumente pot fi utilizate de: oameni de știință din diverse domenii de cunoaștere pentru continuarea cercetărilor științifice în domeniul sexualității persoanelor vârstnice; practicieni din domeniul consilierii psihologice, psihoterapiei, terapiei de familie, sexologiei, specialiști din alte profesii de asistență care lucrează cu persoanele de vârsta a treia. Rezultatele obținute pot fi utilizate ca material didactic în cadrul cursurilor Psihologie generală, Psihologia vârstelor, Gerontologie, Sexologie etc.

Aprobarea și implementarea rezultatelor științifice. Datele teoretice și rezultatele empirice a cercetării au fost prezentate la conferințe științifice internaționale și naționale: a II-a Conferință Internațională de Psihologie Aplicată *Current Affairs and Perspectives in Psychological Research*, 29-30 noiembrie 2022, Chișinău, USM; Conferință științifică națională cu participare internațională *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare*, 10-11 noiembrie 2022, Chișinău, USM; Conferința științifică națională *Metodologii contemporane de cercetare și evaluare*, 22-23 aprilie 2021, Chișinău, USM; Conferința internațională „*Kaleidoscope*” 31 mai – 2 iunie 2023, Universitatea A.I. Cuza, Iasi, Romania; discutate la seminare metodologice ale Asociației Sexologilor din Israel. Rezultatele studiului au fost utilizate în activitatea practică în calitate de psihoterapeut, specialist-sexolog; în cadrul terapiei de grup cu persoane vârstnice în centrul „Ela”; în cadrul cursurilor universitare *Psihologie generală, Psihologia vârstei, Psihologia sănătății, Bazele consilierii psihologice, Psihoterapia pozitivă și narativă*.

ANNOTATION

Slavinski Marina. Sexuality as a factor of psychological well-being in old age. PhD Thesis in Psychology. Chisinau, 2024.

The paper's structure: The work consists of an annotation in Romanian, English and Russian, content, introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, 148 pages of basic text, bibliography of 300 titles and 5 annexes, declaration of responsibility and CV of the author. This paper contains 28 figures and 38 tables. The obtained results are published in 9 scientific papers.

Keywords: old age, psychological well-being, sexuality, sexual activity, sexual health, sexual behavior, stereotypes about sexuality.

The research aim is to investigate sexuality as a factor affecting psychological well-being in old age.

Research objectives: analyze existing approaches in modern scientific literature to the problems of psychological well-being, the phenomenon of sexuality, and the socio-psychological characteristics of old age; develop and validate a diagnostic questionnaire aimed at studying sexuality in old age; empirically investigate the level of psychological well-being and the peculiarities of sexuality in the elderly; determine the significance of sexuality in the subjective experience of psychological well-being among the elderly, considering socio-biological factors; develop and test a training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age; formulate conclusions and develop recommendations for older people, for psychologists and professionals in the helping professions, institutions and decision-making bodies.

The novelty and scientific originality of the research results. This research is a multidisciplinary examination of the issues of old age and aging at the socio-psychological level, integrating psychological, medical, philosophical, sociological, and geriatric perspectives. It has been established that sexuality in old age remains significant and is not entirely lost. The study demonstrates that more active sexual behavior in old age correlates with a more active life stance and a higher level of psychological well-being, with key factors being a positive attitude towards one's body and the absence of stereotypes about elderly sexual behavior. The diagnostic method for studying the peculiarities of sexuality in old age has been introduced into research practice. A new model of psychological support for the elderly, aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age.

The results obtained, which contribute to the solution of an important scientific problem, consist in establishing the role of sexuality as a factor in the psychological well-being of older people; in the development and validation of the questionnaire "Sexuality of older people (60+)"; in the development and implementation of a training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age.

The theoretical significance of the research resides in expanding the scientific understanding of the sexuality of elderly individuals and its relationship with their subjective experience of psychological well-being. This study productively integrates key theories concerning aging and old age from psychology, medicine, philosophy, sociology, and gerontology, specifically applied to the sexual domain. The findings and conclusions update existing theoretical perspectives in general psychology, age psychology, and gerontology regarding the psychological aspects of elderly sexuality as a component of psychological well-being.

The applied value of the research lies in the development, validation and approbation of the questionnaire "Sexuality of older people (60+)", which gives a quantitative idea of the degree of expression of such aspects as sexual stereotypes in relation to the sexual life of an elderly person, sexual behavior, sexual health, attitude to the body, and the general level of sexuality. And also, in the developed training program aimed at improving the psychological well-being of older people through the formation of a positive image of sexuality in old age, built in the context of an eclectic approach and using the exercises proposed by the author. These tools can be used by: scientists of various fields of knowledge for further scientific research in the field of sexuality of older people; practitioners in the field of psychological counselling and psychotherapy, family therapy, sexology, specialists of other helping professions working with older people. The results obtained can be used as methodological material in courses on General Psychology, Age Psychology, Gerontology, Sexology, etc.

Approbation and implementation of research results. The theoretical and empirical data obtained were discussed at international and national scientific conferences: 2nd International Conference on Applied Psychology *Current Affairs and Perspectives in Psychological Research*, November 29-30, 2022, Chisinau, USM; National Scientific Conference with international participation *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare*, November 10-11, 2022, Chisinau, USM; National Scientific Conference *Metodologii contemporane de cercetare și evaluare*, April 22-23, 2021, Chisinau, USM; International Conference in Humanities and Social Sciences "*Kaleidoscope*", May 31 - June 2, 2023, University of A.I. Cuza, Iasi, Romania; and methodological seminars of the Association of Sexologists of Israel; and were applied in practical activities as a psychotherapist and sexologist specialist, within the framework of group therapy with older adults at the 'Ela' center, and in lecture courses on *General Psychology, Age Psychology, Health Psychology, Fundamentals of Psychological Counseling, Positive and Narrative Psychotherapy*.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Славинская Марина. Сексуальность как фактор психологического благополучия в пожилом возрасте. Диссертация на соискание ученой степени доктора психологии. Кишинев, 2024.

Структура работы: Работа состоит из аннотации на румынском, английском и русском языках, содержания, введения, трех глав, выводов и рекомендаций, 148 страниц основного текста, библиографии (300 источников) и приложений (5), декларация об ответственности и CV автора. Работа содержит 28 рисунков, 38 таблиц. По результатам исследования опубликовано 9 научных работ.

Ключевые слова: пожилой возраст, психологическое благополучие, сексуальность, сексуальная активность, сексуальное здоровье, сексуальное поведение, стереотипы о сексуальности.

Цель: изучение сексуальности как фактора психологического благополучия пожилых людей.

Задачи исследования: проанализировать существующие в современном научном знании подходы к проблеме психологического благополучия, феномена сексуальности, к социально-психологическим особенностям пожилого возраста; разработать и апробировать опросник, направленный на исследование сексуальности в пожилом возрасте; эмпирически исследовать уровень психологического благополучия и особенности сексуальности пожилых людей; выявить значимость сексуальности в переживании чувства психологического благополучия в зависимости социально-биологических факторов; разработать и апробировать программу тренинга, направленного на повышение уровня психологического благополучия путем формирования положительного образа сексуальности; сформулировать выводы и разработать рекомендации для пожилых людей, для психологов и специалистов помогающих профессий, учреждений и органов, принимающих решения.

Научная новизна и оригинальность: работа представляет собой мультидисциплинарное исследование на социально-психологическом уровне проблем старости и старения, построенное на интеграции психологических, медицинских, философских, социологических и гериатрических идей. В рамках исследования: установлено, что сексуальность в пожилом возрасте не утрачивается полностью, а остается значимой; доказано, что более активное сексуальное поведение в пожилом возрасте сопровождается более активной жизненной позицией и более высоким уровнем психологического благополучия; введена в научно-исследовательскую практику методика диагностики особенностей сексуальности людей пожилого возраста; предложена новая модель психологической помощи пожилым людям, направленная на повышение уровня психологического благополучия путем формирования положительного образа сексуальности.

Полученные результаты, способствующие решению важной научной проблемы, заключаются в установлении роли сексуальности как фактора психологического благополучия пожилых людей; в разработке, валидации опросника «Сексуальность людей пожилого возраста (60+)»; в разработке и внедрении тренинговой программы, направленной на повышение психологического благополучия пожилых людей путем формирования положительного образа сексуальности.

Теоретическая значимость работы заключается в расширении научных представлений о сексуальности людей пожилого возраста и ее взаимосвязи с субъективным переживанием чувства психологического благополучия. В работе продуктивно использованы основные положения относительно старения и старости, разработанные в психологии, медицине, философии, социологии, геронтологии и конкретизированы применительно к сексуальной сфере. Положения и выводы диссертационного исследования позволяют обновить существующие представления общей психологии, возрастной психологии об особенностях сексуальности пожилых людей как одного из аспектов психологического благополучия.

Практическая значимость исследования заключается в разработке, валидации и апробации опросника, дающего количественное представление о степени выраженности таких аспектов сексуальности как сексуальные стереотипы в отношении сексуальной жизни, сексуальное поведение, сексуальное здоровье, отношение к телу; в разработке тренинговой программы, направленной на повышение психологического благополучия путем формирования позитивного образа сексуальности в пожилом возрасте, построенной в русле эклектического подхода и с использованием предлагаемых автором упражнений. Данные инструменты могут использоваться: учеными различных областей знаний для дальнейших исследований в области сексуальности пожилых людей; практикующими специалистами в области психотерапии, семейной терапии, сексологии и др. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы в качестве методического материала в курсах по Общей психологии, Возрастной психологии, Геронтологии, Сексологии и т.д.

Внедрение научных результатов: теоретические и эмпирические данные, полученные в ходе исследования, обсуждались на международных и национальных научных конференциях: 2-я Международная конференция по Прикладной Психологии *Current Affairs and Perspectives in Psychological Research*, 29-30 ноября, 2022, Кишинев, USM; Национальная научная конференция с международным участием *Integrare prin cercetare și inovare*, 10-11 ноября, 2022, Кишинев, USM; Национальная научная конференция *Metodologii contemporane de cercetare și evaluaire*, 22-23 апреля 2021, Кишинев, USM; Международная конференция "Калейдоскоп", 31 мая – 2 июня 2023 г., Яссы, Румыния, Университет А.И. Куза; на методических семинарах Ассоциации сексологов Израиля. Результаты исследования были использованы в практической деятельности в качестве психотерапевта, специалиста-сексолога; в рамках групповой терапии с пожилыми людьми в центре "Эла", Израиль; в лекционных курсах *Общая психология, Возрастная психология, Психология здоровья, Основы психологического консультирования, Позитивная и нарративная психотерапия*.

SLAVINSKI MARINA

**SEXUALITY AS A FACTOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-
BEING IN OLD AGE**

511.01- GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY

ABSTRACT

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