

Has Demographic Revolution Come to a Halt? An Approximation to Successful Aging and the Need for Socio-Educational Action in the New Normal

*¿Se ha detenido la revolución demográfica?
Una aproximación al envejecimiento exitoso y la necesidad
de la acción socioeducativa en la nueva normalidad*

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in how the aging process is integrated into current societies. The existing body of research on aging suggests that society must promote support for successful aging, which implies living more and better. In this way, extensive research shows that older adults need to be engaged in social participation (Raymond and Grenier, 2015). Therefore, in recent years, older adult education has become a decisive part of the different policies applied to achieve successful aging. The purpose of this paper is to review the various ways in which society acts when facing aging, with special attention devoted to the Spanish situation. This study examines how demographics have transformed in the last decades, considering the impact of the

RESUMEN

En los últimos años ha aumentado el interés por saber cómo se integra el proceso de envejecimiento en las sociedades actuales. El cuerpo de investigación existente sobre el envejecimiento sugiere que la sociedad debe promover el apoyo al envejecimiento exitoso, lo que implica vivir más y vivir mejor. De esta forma, extensas investigaciones muestran que los adultos mayores necesitan involucrarse en la participación social (Raymond y Grenier, 2015), por lo que, en los últimos años, la educación de los adultos mayores se ha convertido en una parte decisiva de las diferentes políticas aplicadas para lograr un envejecimiento exitoso. El objetivo de este trabajo es revisar las diferentes formas en que la sociedad actúa ante el envejecimiento, con especial atención a la situación española. Este estudio

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recent Covid-19 pandemic and the different implications that it poses for the quality of life and successful aging. A revision of the main aging theories and recommendations to achieve successful aging are provided. Socio-educational actions linked to successful aging promotion are presented, highlighting some university programmes specifically designed for older adults. This lifelong learning scheme has the potential to revolutionize current educational practices to socially integrate older adults in postmodern societies.

Keywords: demography; education for older adults; lifelong learning; quality of life; successful aging.

examina cómo se ha transformado la demografía en las últimas décadas, considerando el impacto de la reciente pandemia de Covid-19 y las diferentes implicaciones que tiene para la calidad de vida y el envejecimiento exitoso. Se proporciona una revisión de las principales teorías del envejecimiento y recomendaciones para lograr un envejecimiento exitoso. Se presentan acciones socioeducativas vinculadas a la promoción exitosa del envejecimiento, destacando algunos programas universitarios específicamente diseñados para adultos mayores. Este esquema de aprendizaje permanente tiene el potencial de revolucionar la práctica educativa actual para integrar socialmente a los adultos mayores en las sociedades posmodernas.

Palabras clave: demografía; educación para adultos mayores; aprendizaje permanente; calidad de vida; envejecimiento exitoso.

Introduction

The aging process has always been surrounded by curiosity. This interest might be caused by the need to escape deterioration, disease and, utterly, death. Many Ancient cultures, such as the Roman, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, or Aztec, provide us with many historical examples of this concern (Casamayor-Mancisidor, 2017; Harris, 2000; Sweeney, 2004). In our current society, this concern shared by all human beings is strengthened by the tireless pursuit of retaining and keeping youth for as long as possible. In postmodern societies, where consumerism is overwhelming, and everything is getting increasingly ephemeral, youth is an asset to be kept. However, the idea of finitude is linked to the very concept of humanity (Gilleard and Higgs, 2014; Kapahi and Vijg, 2009; Moreno-Crespo, 2011; Pedrero-García, 2012, 2019).

Currently, the new is valued against the old; the ephemeral is ahead of the durable, finding us in a dizzying pace of progress and changes at all levels. On the one hand, we find that we must adapt to this changing society through lifelong education. On the other hand, we are faced with situations in which “validity” has expired in the face of the constant ap-

pearance of “new” versions, condemning the “old” versions to obsolescence. People are not obsolete as they age, but today, this seems to be happening as older people become a seemingly invisible collective. Paradoxically, until the recent Covid-19 crisis, we were facing a demographic revolution in which the world’s population was involved in an aging process, which increased older adults’ visibility.

The main causes of the growth of the older population are the increase in life expectancy and, consequently, the decrease in mortality or dramatic decreases in the number of births, as well as advances in health and large migrations (World Bank, 2021). Other issues that must be considered are economic, biological, psychological, social, and ecological, as well as positive mood, social contacts, activity, a period of high schooling, job satisfaction, and good socio-economic status (Christensen, Doblhammer, Rau and Vaupel, 2009; Merriam and Kee, 2014; Murphy and Topel, 2006; World Health Organization, 2015). Along these lines, Moreno-Crespo (2011) lists a series of criteria or perspectives from which to analyse the factors that affect quality of life and successful aging: the Human Development Index, motivation, the vitamin model, theories of aging, long live education; socio-educational policies and the promotion of longevity. However, the trend towards a higher life expectancy and successful aging seems to have come to a halt caused by the global Covid-19 crisis, as it was especially deathly to older adults and its long-term effects on demographics are still uncertain.

What has sadly been confirmed by the recent pandemic is that old adults are an especially vulnerable group, and that they act as an early indicator for social well-being. Therefore, they should be recognized and empowered. Their quality of life should be improved for them to live more and better at the same time of being referents in their context as productive and agents at the socio-educational and economic levels (Heenan, 2010; Hill, Betts and Gardner, 2015; Moreno-Crespo, 2015; Newman and Hatton-Yeo, 2008).

The aging process and its conceptualisation have experienced great changes as generally the aging process of our great-grand parents was different for the one of our great-grandparents as well as that of our parents and ourselves. The associated biological changes should also be considered. such as age-related diseases emerging because of increased longevity that were unknown 50 years ago, since few people were 65 years old. These are diseases such as Alzheimer or Parkinson’s.

When focussing on older adults, society perceives, transmits, and assimilates that they are in the last period of their life and that the only thing that awaits them is a process of deterioration in all aspects, which suggests a negative sense to this vital stage. Therefore, certain ideas about the elderly are settled: they are associated with a social burden, lack of productivity, the pre-eminence of loneliness, poverty, selfishness, and the progressive degeneration of their physical, social, intellectual, and psychological faculties. In this manner, the prejudices and social stereotypes established in the collective ideology are defined (Bouché, 2003; Coudin and Alexopoulos, 2010; Dionigi, 2015; Fernández-López, 1998).

Schaie and Willis (2003: 16) indicate that “[...] one of the main objectives of science is to dispel the misconceptions surrounding the phenomenon under study”. For this reason, more investment in the development of elderly studies is required, as so many stereotypes are established regarding older adults, and they conform a growing population sector which has received insufficient attention.

The impact of the increase in the elderly population has triggered the implementation of different measures. One of the most remarkable measures was the establishment of the “International Plan of Action” for older adults, also known as the “Vienna Plan” United Nations (UN) World Assembly on Aging in Vienna held in 1982. Also, 1999, was designated by the UN as “International Year of Older Persons”. In 2002, the Second World Assembly on Aging took place in Madrid, Spain, and there the principles of the Vienna Plan and the UN “Principles for the Elderly” (1991) were reaffirmed, and from a more pragmatic perspective an “International Plan of Action on Aging” was established. This last document recommended measures devoted to the preparation for this stage of life by adopting good habits that improve our quality of life, ensuring healthy aging (Caldera, 2013; Kendig, Lucas and Anstey, 2013).

The need to expand knowledge about the aging process forces us to adapt to the pace of transformation of this population and to focus on the aspects that promote their quality of life, making it possible to extend life expectancy by prolonging the maintenance of the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of the older adult (Worldometers, 2021). The short-term benefits of research focused on this aspect are promising and, in the long run, will benefit all of us who share the experience of being immersed in one of the stages of the life cycle. We must all become aware of the situation that we are in and of the needs that older adults have at all levels, suggesting the need to study the aspects surrounding quality of life in successful aging. This idea, translated into society, presents the need to educate to live healthily; thus, a lifelong educational approach is necessary (Merriam and Bierema, 2013; Merriam and Baumgartner, 2007; Merriam and Kee, 2014; Sabia *et al.*, 2012).

This paper examines the aging process from different perspectives as well as the different implications that the examined assessments pose for quality of life and successful aging, with special attention to the Spanish context. Also, as the recent Covid-19 global crisis has severely hit old adults, the concept of demographic revolution is revisited.

In the light of the new global situation, this work provides an examination of the general trends regarding a successful aging process as well as the measures and actions addressed to promote longevity and well-being. The study has been systemised and delimited according to the examined topics and aims of this research, following a critical synthesis (Bengochea and Levin, 2012). Demographic data are examined to provide support for the necessity of the implementation of socio-educational actions for older adults.

The demographic revolution: promoting longevity

In 2019, the UN published some documents that included experts' estimates regarding the global population. They were made using updated data based on detailed analyses of all the available information about relevant historical demographic trends. That information was extracted from national population censuses, as well as information from vital registration systems and national representative sample surveys. The 2019 revision presented a continuous population growth from that year until 2100 (United Nations, 2019a). Unfortunately, the Covid-19 outbreak has stopped the ability of statistical authorities to collect and process data in a traditional manner and, therefore, the effects of the pandemic on the different population groups are still to be assessed and further studies and new methodologies and guidelines are required (Eurostat, 2021).

Even if the assessment of population growth has encountered certain difficulties, social and demographic research are essential to understand and justify research on older adults. The interest in this group comes from the transformation in the population structure that was identified before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which entails a rising increase in individuals over 65 years of age. In the words of Limón Mendizábal (2000: 169):

Not only demographers and sociologists, but any observer attentive to the present society can easily discover that today's world, especially in the countries with the greatest economic and social development, is undoubtedly on the threshold of a new one, the era of longevity.

In referring to the demographic revolution, there was an increase in longevity, together with a drop in birth rates and mortality. For this reason, although population growth had not been globally homogeneous due to the notable differences between the great regions of the world, it could be stated that since the middle of the 20th Century, the population pyramid began to show a metamorphosis towards the tip of the spear, with which we were sufficiently familiar in the 21st Century. According to UN data (2019b), in 2015, the number of people under 15 doubled that of older adults aged 60 and over; however, projections for 2050 stated that these numbers would be matched quickly. What is more, the previsions stated that the number of older adults aged 60 and over would double that of people aged under 15 by 2050 and that it would triple by 2100. Also, the number of older adults aged 80 or over will triple by 2050 and increase sevenfold by 2100.

We are facing a progressive increase in the number of elderly individuals in the population pyramid. The increase in the number of elderly people in the face of the falling birth rate means that the weight of the elderly in the population increases, revealing an aging population. It is a reality that the aging of the population happens in the global demographic panorama and occurs more markedly in developed countries. It is safe to state that

the population will continue to age gradually because, on one hand, the birth rate suffered a “moderate” decline worldwide until the beginning of the 21st Century, though predictions forecasted that it would worsen in the coming decades; on the other hand, the number of people over 64 is supposed to persistently increase (Lee, 2011; Merriam and Kee, 2014; Moreno-Crespo, 2011).

Social, economic, and hygienic-sanitary advances, among others, have positively influenced the increase in life expectancy, which, together with the decline in the birth rate, has an impact on the aging of the population. We can verify the distribution of the population over 64 years of age by regions of the world in the 2019-2100 period and where Europe and North America stand out, with this age group constituting 18 million people in 2019.

Life expectancy at birth indicates the number of years that a new-born will live if demographic patterns remain the same as in the year of birth. The increase in this index represents a promotion of longevity, which compares the life expectancy at birth for several countries in 1980, 2010 and 2020. We verified that the increase in life expectancy at birth is constant. However, countries such as Brazil or India have had increased life expectancy at birth by 15 years. The country that has increased its life expectancy by 11 years is China, and by 10 years Australia, Finland, Iceland, and Italy. Germany, France, and Spain have increased their life expectancy by 9 years. Argentina stands out as the country that has the smallest increase in life expectancy at birth, 7 years.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has slightly altered this trend, affecting particularly those that were 60 years old or above, who were categorized by the WHO as especially vulnerable (Abbas *et al.*, 2021). As Covid-19 is still greatly affecting many countries' economies and health systems, further analysis is needed to assess the impact that this global pandemic will have on life expectancy and demography in the next decades. Another aspect that is still unclear is the long-term effect on life expectancy the pandemic will have. Some research indicated that life expectancy was reduced by 12 % in 2020 (Andrasfay and Goldman, 2021).

In the case of Spain, before the pandemic, data from the INE (2021) show that, over the last four decades, life expectancy in Spain has improved. We found that the increase for both sexes has been almost ten years. Women had a life expectancy of 76 years in 1995 and 86,2 years in 2019. On the other hand, men had a life expectancy of 70 years in 1975 and currently have a life expectancy of 86,9 years. Thus, expectancy at birth is approximately 5 years greater in women than in men.

When addressing older adults, life expectancy at age 65 was around 15 years for both sexes in 1975, and in 2015 it augmented 5 years, reaching 85. Thus, those who turned 65 in 1975 had a life expectancy up to approximately 80 years old and those who turned 65 in 2015 had a life expectancy of approximately 85 years. The life expectancy for women aged 65 increased from 16 years in 1975 to 22 years in 2015, and to 22 years in 2020. On the other hand, the life expectancy for men aged 65 years of age increased by 18 years from 1975 to

2020. Until recently, it was stated that the population group showing growth was that of people aged 65 and over, but it is now emerging that the growing population group is that of people aged 85 and over. Still, as stated before, this age group is the one that is suffering more acutely the effects of the pandemic. There is no doubt that there is an aging population, but we understand that in many respects, it is not possible to speak generically of the elderly population as being “65 and over”.

One of the factors affecting the aging of the population is that the birth rate has declined. When studying this phenomenon, it can be noted that some of the determinants that influence this process are the delay in the age at which the couple decides to form a family and the incorporation of women into the labour market. Together with the search for a stable socio-economic situation, both factors result in women's later entry into motherhood and a decrease in the number of children per woman (Merriam and Kee, 2014; Monforte, Franco and Conde, 2001; United Nations, 2021).

The population group of older adults is determined by their demographic evolution. It is a population group with differentiated aspects that, from the perspective of the various fields of knowledge, make it attractive for research. With the aging of the population and, therefore, the increase in life expectancy, we find a population of older adults over 64 mostly composed of people who can still be considered young at biological, psychological, and social levels. It is important to highlight the factor of the “feminization of aging”, as the number of women is higher than their male counterparts and their life expectancy, and the “aging of aging” as being characteristic of this process in developed countries. We are in a process of population aging powered by a significant increase in longevity and declining birth rates. Increasing life expectancy also increases the chances of finding people with a certain degree of dependency and vulnerability at increasing ages, as recent events have sadly made obvious. Del Barrio and Abellán (2009) discuss a “quasi-causality” between old age and dependency that, together with increasing life expectancy, leads us to determine that the number of people affected will increase in the coming decades. Society must be prepared to prevent and cope with situations of dependency in the cases in which it occurs, in addition to any type of social and health care required. For this reason, promoting successful aging, which extends life expectancy and, more importantly, life expectancy with quality of life, is paramount (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2009; García-Lizana, 2013; Ramos-Monteagudo, Yordi-García and Miranda-Ramos, 2016).

There is a concern about promoting successful aging and quality of life in this population. The demographic revolution that we, despite Covid-19 and its short and long-term effects, are still experiencing requires a social and institutional commitment to the promotion of successful aging as a strategy to ensure the health and longevity of older adults for many years, with an emphasis on improving their quality of life and reducing the consequences of dependency and diseases linked to the aging process (Brito-Quezia, Menezes-Nobre and

Olinda-Alves, 2015; Fernández-Ballesteros, 2009; García-Lizana, 2013; Ramos-Monteagudo, Yordi-García and Miranda-Ramos, 2016).

Main theories of aging

Thanks to scientific data, some existing received ideas and stereotypes about the elderly have changed. Over the years, several theories on the aging process have been established. Although none of them seems to address it from a holistic approach, the most significant theories are included as follows (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2000; Fernández-Lópiz, 1998; García-Mínguez, 2004; Pérez-Serrano, 2004): 1) biological theories: genetic theories, cellular theories (free radicals and cell differentiation), systemic theories (immune function impairment, the mechanism of the endocrine system, catastrophic, etc.), theories of vital events, etc.; 2) psychological theories: developmental theories, the life cycle approach, the theory of reduced processing resources, the behavioural genetic line; and 3) sociological theories: activity theory, continuity theory, dissociation theory, modernization theory, social environment theory, subculture theory, etc.

The great advance of recent decades is that aging has begun to be recognized as a vital stage that can be productive at all levels, like earlier stages of life (Moragas, 1998; Sarabia-Cobo, 2009). From the perspective of promoting healthy, successful aging that allows us to live longer and with better quality of life, we prefer the sociological theories of activity and continuity.

Activity theory is one of the most publicized theories. Havighurst (1987) argues that the basis of successful aging is activity; in this research, it is stated that activity is linked to older people being better adapted and having greater longevity. "Activity theory seeks, therefore, to determine the psychosocial causes that could explain the maladaptation of the elderly before retirement" (Fernández-Lópiz, 1998: 211). Another theory, which is closely related to activity theory, is continuity theory. This theory argues that despite the changes that may occur physically, socially, and psychologically during the aging process, the older adult can maintain a series of patterns of thinking, activities, and social relations. "In short, we can affirm that there is a continuum in people that can lead us to predict current thinking and relationships that they will have in the future" (Moreno-Crespo, 2011: 139). Each of these theories attempts to explain the process of aging coupled with the concept of successful aging. In this manner, we argue that elderly people can continue to maintain their activity in a way that impacts their quality of life, their own growth and that of their environment, with all the opportunities that it represents for our society. To complete this vision or philosophy of healthy living, we reproduce the words of Sarabia-Cobo (2009: 205):

Aging is itself a process whose quality is directly related to how the person meets his needs throughout his life cycle. The satisfaction of the needs of the human species is what determines the so-called “quality of life”, and this is, in turn, the concrete foundation of social welfare.

Some indications for successful aging

Defining quality of life and successful aging is still a challenging task because, conceptually, a consensus has not been reached, coupled with the high subjective component of both terms (Merriam and Kee, 2014; Sarabia-Cobo, 2009). However, there are several authors who make a series of recommendations that have an impact on the achievement of successful aging, and we explain them below.

The results of this study indicate that there is a direct relationship between physical, cognitive, emotional, or spiritual activity and satisfactory aging. Such activities include those that improve not only the physical and/or mental state but also the feeling of contentment with oneself and one's environment, favouring healthy aging and longevity promotion.

Havighurst (1972) establishes a series of conditions to be taken into account to attain successful aging: 1) remaining physically healthy and adjusting to limitations; 2) maintaining an adequate income; 3) adjusting to new roles; 4) establishing adequate housing and living conditions; 5) maintaining identity and social status; 6) restructuring one's social circle; 7) learning to use free time; 8) establishing new roles in the family; and 9) achieving integrity through the acceptance of one's life.

In her elaboration of recommendations, Limón Mendizábal (2003: 21) uses the verbal gerund to emphasize the action of these activities as an attitude that must be assimilated and maintained by every person during the aging process: 1) staying active and doing activities; 2) being informed and in permanent formation; 3) promoting coexistence and social integration; and 4) participating actively, critically, and creatively.

We also highlight the importance of promoting quality of life and successful aging based on public policies. We highlight three areas of action in which to invest resources (OMS, 2001, cit. in Ramos, 2009: 35): 1) reducing the risk factors associated with the most frequent causes of morbidity and promoting protective factors for the entire population (healthy eating, promoting physical exercise, preventing the consumption of toxic substances, improvement of the health system at all levels, etc.); 2) favouring the protective factors of cognitive functioning, from literacy programmes for the entire population to the promotion of education for all ages, with a specific impact on all programmes that enhance learning and mental activity for the elderly; and 3) promoting the empowerment of the elderly through an improvement in their channels of social participation and in all programmes and interventions that enhance their personal autonomy.

According to Moreno-Crespo (2011), interventions must take into account the social, pedagogical, psychological and biological processes of older adults: 1) promoting and favouring continuous and permanent formation; 2) increasing socio-community and socio-cultural care; 3) encouraging participation in the community; 4) increasing cultural, artistic and creative offers; 5) ensuring diversity in occupations for leisure and leisure; 6) providing information and training on altruistic, association, solidarity and volunteer activities; 7) promoting social recognition of the role of older adults in the community; and 8) promoting the state of satisfaction and contentment with oneself.

Ramos-Monteaigudo, Yordi-García and Miranda-Ramos (2016: 335-336) reviewed aspects of the promotion of successful aging and recommendations of international organizations and expert forum, and they made the following proposals: 1) developing actions that promote an equitable distribution in the provision of care in the family; 2) disseminating best practices in the different contexts in the fight against all types of discrimination for reasons of age and gender, particularly in situations surrounding older women; 3) encouraging multi-generational spaces of coexistence to avoid segregation by age; 4) promoting active aging through educational actions and a life cycle perspective in which health promotion and disease prevention are considered; 5) promoting the factors that protect cognitive functioning; 6) generating research and innovation proposals capable of making appropriate proposals for the fundamental needs of the elderly, which in turn are inclusive and participatory; and 7) ensuring protection policies not only for the elderly person but also for the family as a whole due to the dynamics of change that arise when one of its members is already older.

Of all the recommendations, we focus on socio-educational actions, which themselves imply some type of influence on activity, social participation and the social circle, the physical and mental state, the feeling of contentment with oneself and one's environment, satisfaction with one's own life, adjustment to new roles, identity and social status, free time, the process of permanent and continuous learning, and empowerment, among others. Therefore, any action aimed at promoting successful aging should include socio-educational actions.

Lifelong education: socio-educational actions for successful aging

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has promoted lifelong learning as a new paradigm that requires new approaches to intervention and training with older adults. It is evident that at any age, we can continue to learn. Actions regarding older adults cannot leave aside something as important as education, understood as a process that develops throughout life. Education as a facilitator of intellectual and spiritual life, as well as personal growth and development,

is maintained over the years. It is the responsibility of all of us to contribute to the educational improvement of all generations. Therefore, we must bear in mind that society needs to attend to the educational concerns of the older adult, recognizing their influence on the quality of life (Merriam and Kee, 2014; Moreno-Crespo, 2011, 2015). This process has resulted in several initiatives from public institutions and in the creation of different centers and entities dedicated to lifelong learning, such as open universities, adult secondary education, adult education (including levels of literacy and neo-reading as well as other related sectors) and university programmes for the elderly.

In Toulouse, France, the first university programme for older people was established in 1973. Since their appearance, training programmes organized by the university and aimed at older adults have had several denominations: senior classroom, open senior classroom, experience classroom, and open classroom, among others. In Spain, adult education centres, senior classrooms, and university programmes for the elderly began to appear in the 1980s. The experienced a dramatic increase and, in 2016, the Association of University Programs for the Elderly had 45 partner universities. The main idea behind these socio-educational initiatives is approaching knowledge from a theoretical-practical perspective and, at the same time, adapting to social changes (Fernández-García and Ponce de León, 2013).

As an example of the spirit of the university programmes for the elderly, below are the socio-educational activities offered by the Open University of the Universidad Pablo de Olavide (2016) programme: 1) promoting and encouraging continuous and permanent training for the full development of adults; 2) taking advantage of the cultural wealth of the elderly to enhance their self-esteem; 3) promoting artistic and creative activities that encourage the use of leisure time; 4) facilitating volunteering and mutual aid as factors that are conducive to solidarity and coexistence; 5) promoting intergenerational relationships between university students and senior students; and 6) promoting associations as a form of participation and social involvement and the continuity of lifelong training.

Participation in socio-educational interventions by older adults has been proven to favour quality of life, to enhance successful aging and to delay the appearance or to slow the progression of dependence associated with the aging process (Merriam and Kee, 2014; Ramos-Monteagudo, Yordi-García and Miranda-Ramos, 2016). In the words of Fernández-García and Ponce de León (2013: 93):

Learning is one of the best ways to keep the mind active and delay the appearance of changes in brain structure associated with neuronal aging, as it happens in some brain areas (caudate nucleus, cerebellum, hippocampus, and frontal regions), which can be affected by a reduction in its volume, hindering with age cognitive processes like memory.

Conclusions

Even if many of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic require further study, data show that we are still experiencing a demographic revolution that needs to be understood and societies should adapt to this new longevity era, as the increase in the percentage of older adults in transforming the population structure. As a result, there is a growing interest in the aging process that is helping to dismiss many stereotypes regarding older adults. In the same line, new theories about aging have arisen and, with these advances, aging has begun to be considered a vital stage in which a person can be productive at all levels. Consequently, it is paramount to highlight the importance of research regarding those factors that promote quality of life in the aging process, as well as criteria that improve old adults' environment as well as their cognitive, physical, participatory, and spiritual dimensions.

The findings of this study suggest that any action oriented toward the promotion of successful aging slows down the appearance of dependencies and/or diseases related to the aging process. Among these factors, this study is focused on the socio-educational ones. These socio-educative factors can support older adults and make them consider their own vital situation as one with a successful quality of life and, therefore, make them able to enjoy the experience that is associated with the successful aging process. Therefore, it is important to promote initiatives allowing participation in socio-educational interventions with older adults. In this sense, a new range of options for social participation for older adults is offered, as well as investments not only in the quality of life of this group but also in the quality of life of the community and society. Socio-educational actions, such as university programmes for old adults are encouraged if we are to support the promotion of successful aging and acknowledge that old adults need to be fully integrated into our society.

Society must encourage dignified aging. This implies the empowerment of old adults. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize them as socially productive agents by fighting the existing stereotypes related to aging, providing environments of social participation where older adults are represented, and articulating all the necessary support measures at economic, hygiene-sanitary, and socio-educational levels. In this sense, socio-educational actions linked to successful aging promotion are vital if we are to integrate older adults culturally and educationally into the new societies.

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