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## Status and Role Transformations of the Elderly in Modern Russia

Tatyana Mikhailovna Ryabova<sup>1</sup>, Elena Viktorovna Frolova<sup>2</sup>

Olga Vladimirovna Rogach<sup>3</sup>, Andrey Vladimirovich Kirillov<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

The article reviews the results of an author's study with the aim of exploring the needs and expectations of Russian citizens when they reach retirement age in view of changing status and role positions. The focus is on studying the social and psychological conditions that accompany the aging process, analyzing the reasons for the termination of employment, the evaluation of the life orientations of today's retirees. The study included a survey of 437 people who reached the retirement age and 20 in-depth interviews with pensioners. As a result, the authors confirmed the hypotheses about the dominant influence of the current "culture of caring and helping children" on the target setting in the "third age" that determine the decision to terminate or continue working. A modern pensioner is in a constant choice between work, "caring" and "life for oneself." The hypothesis concerning the concept of successful aging for the Russian pensioner has not found its confirmation in the course of the study. The study identified the following reasons for the termination / continued employment upon reaching retirement age: - health status; - the desire to live for themselves; - a reduction in the organization; - there is no one to sit with their grandchildren, / - the sense of the importance of their professional activities; - have the strength and desire to continue to work and live as before retirement; - the need to help their children and grandchildren; - fear; - the inability to live on a pension. It was found that the pensioner is perceived as an assistant, supporting children in the education of grandchildren. The degree of independence in making a decision to change the social status affects the satisfaction of the pensioner with his new status and life in connection with the termination of employment. In the current socio-economic conditions, the Russians are among Asian model "respect for old age and elderly" and the European model of personal needs and "expectations deferred". Therefore in most cases, modern pensioner in Russia performs the role of the staff in the family or at work.

**Keywords:** Pensioner, Seniors, Successful aging, Retirement, Culture of care, the Transformation of the pensioner's image.

<sup>1</sup> Candidate of Social Science, *Assistant Professor at the Department of Management and Administration of the Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russia.* E-mail: [tani-87@inbox.ru](mailto:tani-87@inbox.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Doctor of Social Science, Professor of the Department of Management and Administration of the Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: [efrolova06@mail.ru](mailto:efrolova06@mail.ru)

<sup>3</sup> Candidate of Social Science, *Assistant Professor at the Department of Management and Administration of the Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russia.* E-mail: [rogach16@mail.ru](mailto:rogach16@mail.ru)

<sup>4</sup> Doctor of Historical Science, Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Management of the Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russia. E-mail: [a.v.kirillov@mail.ru](mailto:a.v.kirillov@mail.ru)

## Introduction

Retirement is one of the main transitional periods in every person's life. It often leads to imbalances in the psycho-emotional state and social situation (Siu-man et al., 2017). The social status changing due to retirement has an impact on the person's mental state, on changing his perception of society and relatives, transforming his role in life, reflects his financial situation and, subsequently, on health and adaptation to environmental changes. The transition from the category of able-bodied population to the category of pensioners changes a person's relationship with society, children, colleagues. Also it changes person's way of life, socio-cultural and value orientations. Scientists around the world are exploring problems and ways to mitigate the transition period of retirement. In particular, they offer a mentoring program as a technology for preparing for retirement (Siu-man et al., 2017). Scientists also analyze biopsychosocial factors (resources, planning, retirement conditions, pension expectations) that affect life satisfaction (Siguaw et al., 2017). Australian scientists considered the preparation of the elderly for retirement and the formation of readiness for the termination of employment as a factor contributing to satisfaction with life in the third age (Noone et al., 2013).

All over the world, questions about increasing the working age, changing the age limits of retirement, the possibility of working after retirement are constantly being considered. The need to increase the duration of work outside the traditional retirement age is widely recognized. However, very few people are willing to continue working directly within their life strategies (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2005). Continuation of labor activity at post-retirement age is considered as a factor of ensuring financial security (Burkert & Hochfellner, 2016). Many retirees have a problem of lowering their solvency and a deficit in retirement income (Gonzales & Nowell, 2016).

Today age boundaries that characterize the stages of the life cycle are shifting. This is associated with an increase in the average life expectancy and an increase in the reproductive age of citizens. Earlier, 50 - 65 years old people were considered elderly. Today, according to the classification of the World Health Organization (WHO), the elderly are considered to be a person who has reached the age limit of 60 - 75 years. In 1998, a study conducted by Borozdina T.V. and Spiridonova I.A., showed that 50-year-old people plan their future, feel the fullness of their life, but at the age of 60 people begin to evaluate the past, the present, and the future in the same way (Borozdina & Spiridonova, 1998), there is a definite stagnation in development. Most people at this age are reassessed their role in the work collective, in society, in the family due to the aggravation of the state of health. By the age of 70, most people perceive the present better than the future. "Calendar age serves only as a basis for the prohibition or resolution of various social roles and behavior; the fulfillment of these roles in accordance with certain social norms and regulations determines the social age of the person that often not coinciding with the calendar" (Feofanov, 1994). Accordingly, people, retiring at the age of 55 - 60 years, experience psychological discomfort, stress.

Taking into account the aging of the population throughout the world, the study of the transformation of the social roles of the elderly through the prism of their employment, family relationships, the specifics of professional activity is seen as relevant.

In developed countries, the focus of attention in the study of the problems of older people focuses on the issues of "successful aging" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998) or "productive aging". Within the framework of the theory of successful aging, factors that minimize the negative consequences of increasing age, mechanisms for reducing physical, psychological and social morbidity are highlighted (Fries, 1990: 35). Balte's work presents a model of successful aging that includes precedent conditions (for example, selective adaptation and transformation, internal and external resources), process management (choice, optimization and compensation) and results (win maximization and loss minimization, growth, maintenance and regulation losses) (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). In modern conditions, the factors of successful aging are largely determined

by the rapid development of innovative technologies and globalization (Martin, 2015). Successful aging is based on an adequate assessment of its resources, setting realistic life goals and its transforming (Peisah, 2015).

One of the most disputed issue is determinants that ensure a high quality of life in the third age. On the one hand, the most common point of view illustrates the importance of biomedical factors (Glass, 2003; Jeste, 2010), behavioral models aimed at maintaining health (Pruchno & Wilson-Genderson, 2012; Pruchno et al., 2012). On the other hand, successful aging is a heterogeneous concept that is defined subjectively. Research results suggest that successful aging can still be achieved in physical and / or mental illness (Peisah, 2015).

Cognitive and emotional aspects (Depp & Jeste, 2006), self-identification (Cheung & Wu, 2013) are very significant determinants that determine subjective estimates of aging conditions. According to a number of scientists, social well-being is the most common factor in successful aging. This factor is followed by psychological well-being, physical health, spirituality and transcendence, financial security and a favorable ecological and social context for the life of the elderly (Zanjari et al., 2016). Studies of rural communities illustrate the role of social participation (family and community support) in determining successful old age. Family support provides important roles for older people in the family, contributing to their well-being, optimism and productive behavior. Community support means inclusion of elders in public life, participation in events, recognition of their authority (Lewis, 2014).

Other studies center around the category of "quality of life", believing that this is the most meaningful characteristic of successful aging (Hilton et al., 2009). Satisfaction with life is associated with the ability to effectively cope with the achievement of goals based on personal values and priorities (Ji et al., 2014).

The mechanisms for ensuring productive aging include: the organization of leisure activities (Stevens-Ratchford, 2016), activities for the development of physical activity (Perras et al, 2015), the formation of housing communities for the elderly (Meijering & Lager, 2014), socially accessible independent habitat (Holland et al, 2016).

## **Method**

The purpose of the research is to study the needs and expectations of Russian citizens when they reach retirement age in view of changing status and role positions. The focus is on studying the social and psychological conditions that accompany the aging process, analyzing the reasons for the termination of work, assessing the life orientations of modern pensioners. The authors put forward a number of hypotheses: 1. Significantly, the decision to terminate or continue working after reaching retirement age is influenced by the "culture of caring and helping children" that has developed in Russian society; 2. A modern pensioner at the age of 55-65 years is in constant choice between work, "caring" and "life for oneself"; 3. Implementation of the concept of "successful aging" in modern Russian conditions is limited by the lack of conditions for maintaining an active life position and deformation of social and labor relations.

The authors conducted a survey of 437 citizens who reached the retirement age (213 men and 224 women), and 20 in-depth interviews were obtained. Signs of representation: gender, age, profession, employment. The selection of the interview participants was carried out according to the following criteria: - professional employment; - marital status; - The presence of grandchildren under the age of 14 years. The issues proposed for discussion were divided into four areas:

1. The termination or continuation of labor activity, after reaching the retirement age;
2. Change in welfare and satisfaction over time;
3. Changing personal relationships with family members, colleagues, friends;

#### 4. The justification of expectations from reaching retirement age

##### **Results**

The authors conditionally differentiated the answers of respondents depending on the position they occupy (senior position, the middle position, service personnel), on marital status (single, live with children and grandchildren or nearby, live far from children and grandchildren), on the reason for the termination of work (achievement retirement age, for family reasons, on their own will).

The respondents indicated the following main reasons for the termination of work after reaching retirement age:

- The state of health;
- The desire to live for yourself;
- Reduction of staff and employees in organizations;
- There is nobody to sit with grandchildren.

The reasons for continuing to work after reaching retirement age are:

- A sense of the importance of professional activities;
- There are forces and the desire to continue to work and live as before retirement;
- The need to help children and grandchildren;
- Fear of being unnecessary, useless;
- Impossibility to live on pension.

The correlation between these reasons and the position or gender was not identified.

During the interview, respondents stressed that entry into the period of pre-retirement and retirement age affects the relations in the work collective. The elderly are usually the first to be subjected to staff reductions. 18% of respondents noted the "economic crisis and reduction" as the reason for the termination of labor activity. More than half of the elderly, dismissed for this reason, were looking for work on the profile of professional activity, but only a few found work. The others began to sit with their grandchildren (11 people), tried to start their own business (3 people). Also, some were forced to seek work in the low-paid sector: cleaning (29 people), social work (4 people), nurses (7), a security guard (21 people), drivers (5 people).

Almost every third respondent was afraid of losing his job when he entered pre-retirement age. As B.Z. Vulfov notes, one of the main aggravating factors of the psychological oppression of a pensioner is the "drama of unclaimedness". It is an unrealizable potential, a feeling or a fear of one's own uselessness.

Pensioners working at the time of the interview, or holding senior positions before retirement, did not experience such fears. They explained this with their professional relevance, competence or narrow specialization.

**Table 1.** Dependence between the category of the position held and the fear of losing the job after reaching the retirement age, people.

	They were afraid of losing their jobs due to retirement (pre-retirement) age	Have not experienced the fear of losing their jobs due to retirement (pre-retirement) age
Seniors position	17	98
Middle-level employees	158	39
Service staff	91	34

Most of the respondents stressed the need to help children and grandchildren regardless of their financial situation, health status and the availability of work for children and grandchildren. Some (28% of men and 24% of women) noted the key role of material support for children in continuing their work after reaching retirement age. In the course of the interview, the opinion was stressed that the respondents "feel in some way afraid that after the termination of their work they will not feel independent." 25% of citizens who participated in the interview, link their social status, work and their role in solving family issues. Women noted that "if I leave work, they would put me in jail with my grandchildren and will only treat me as a nanny, I would not have the opportunity to manage my time on my own". There was also a correlation between the presence of fears about changing their roles in family relationships and working experience. In spite of this, 8% of men and 27% of women stopped their labor activity to reach the retirement age precisely because of the help to children in the education of grandchildren. Therefore, the culture of "caring" that was formed historically in Russia is one of the stimulating factors in deciding whether to continue activity. The authors also revealed the relationship between the category of the position held and the retirement due to help to children (see Table 2.) with a value of  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2.** Distribution of respondents who made a decision to terminate / continue working activities, based on the interests of children by category of position

	Elderly, retired to sit with their grandchildren		Elderly, working to helping children	
	men	women	men	women
Seniors position	1	7	24	15
Middle-level employees	9	27	14	42
Service staff	7	26	22	30

A number of respondents (16%), who left their works before the retirement age, did not note that they experienced similar fears. On the contrary, they noted the predominance of positive emotions in connection with the onset of retirement age: "additional funds appeared", "I live as before, I get to retire to save and spend on something necessary for the family", "now there is an opportunity to go for free to the sanatorium as a pensioner", etc. Probably, this is due to their settled social position before the

retirement age and the already formed psychological perception of themselves as a nonworking person engaged in home, children and grandchildren.

Many respondents (48%) underlined the psychological aspect in making a decision on the termination of employment in connection with retirement. Irina S., 59 years old: "There will be time for yourself, your interests, but suddenly, in a month or two, you will not know what to do, how to live further." A key role is played by group identity. Group identity is the unofficial psychological pressure from society on a person who is in pre-retirement or retirement age. Maxim M., 62 years old: "At work, colleagues are constantly asked if we are helping our son with our wife. If I say that we gave him education and upbringing, and now let him build his own way of life, it causes misunderstanding and in some ways even condemnation."

18% of the interviewees noted that after retirement and termination of work, they significantly enriched their cultural and spiritual sphere of life in the first few years: "We went with friends around the cities of Russia", "We visited friends who live in other cities and countries", "I travel the world", "We visit with the friends of the exhibition, theaters", etc. 13% indicated that "quietly, peacefully live my life", "we are engaged in our own house and economy", "finally found time for their own interests". However, there was no significant difference in the responses between participants with different marital status. According to interviewees, the key factor of satisfaction and positive emotions from the life stage of the "pension" is an independently taken decision on the termination of employment.

Transformation of the image of a modern pensioner initiates the need to revise the relationship to the elderly. This transformation of the pensioner's image assumes his active life position, working capacity, information literacy, the desire to travel, to learn something new in comparison with previous generations of grandmothers and grandfathers, who, for the most part, led the economy, lived outside the city, raised grandchildren. The majority of respondents (82%) stressed that the biological age of a pensioner does not always correspond to his internal state and attitude. Because of this, many pensioners (27%) expected that the retirement age would provide an opportunity to "live for themselves." Expectations of 18% of pensioners were justified (see Table 3). 9% of the elderly indicated a number of reasons why they can not currently claim that they "live in pleasure": - financial difficulties; - small grandsons; - health problems; - constant endless everyday affairs; - problems of children, etc.

**Table 3.** Assessment of changes in the conditions and quality of life of Russian citizens after reaching the retirement age %

	became better	became worse	did not changed
Relationships with children	10%	25%	65%
Quality of leisure	21%	7%	72%
Financial situation	3%	68%	29%
"Time for yourself"	18%	15%	67%
Health status	7%	39%	54%
Psycho-emotional state	21%	26%	53%

The study showed that after retirement, the modern elderly people are transformed into their social role. In most cases, the economic and socio-psychological state is deteriorating. Often, expectations do not match with reality. Alena M., 59 years old: "Children do not appreciate your care, help is taken for granted"; Eugeny K., 63 years old: "I feel like a servant. I help children as much as possible, but they do not really take my opinion into consideration."

According to the results of the interview, it was revealed that almost all respondents (91%) had life satisfaction from the health and well-being of their relatives, material prosperity, demand and need for the work collective, their relatives and the availability of time "for themselves."

## **Discussion**

The results of the interview show that the main reasons for termination of employment after reaching the retirement age are: - health problems; - education of grandchildren; - reduction, which correlates with ongoing studies (Preter et al., 2013).

An average modern person with approaching retirement age is in constant choice between work, "caring" and "life for oneself." The choice is accompanied by a violation of the psycho-emotional state, destruction, stress, pressure from the team, management and relatives. Today, socio-cultural patterns have been transformed, and the emergence of a new behavioral model of an elderly person is taking place. A modern elderly person of retirement age strives to retain his positions and roles in society, wants to be an active participant in social relations. At the same time he is forced to defend and prove his worth and independence. Traditionally, the socio-cultural image of a pensioner is perceived by society as an individual, requiring support, assistance, attention from relatives. In the new socio-economic conditions, the pensioner is perceived as an assistant, supporting children in the education of grandchildren. And as a result, pensioners perceive themselves as serving personnel.

Information literacy and modern means of communication allow the elderly to actively maintain contacts and start new ones even after the termination of employment. The key role is played by the formation of leisure and educational infrastructure, focused on the needs of the elderly (Frolova, 2014; Frolova & Rogach, 2017).

The satisfaction of the pensioner with his new status and life in connection with the termination of work affects the degree of independence in making a decision to change his social status. These conclusions are confirmed by the results of other studies, according to which it is important how a person perceives this transition. Perception forms a change in happiness between the last wave of full employment and the first wave of full retirement (Calvo et al., 2009).

The scientific literature presents extensive research on the preservation of productive employment in the third age. Empirical studies have identified important areas for successful aging in the workplace: adaptability and health, positive attitudes, employment, personal security, constant concentration and achievement of personal goals (Robson et al., 2006). Other important determinants of successful aging in the professional activity include: development proactivity, planning and organization, clear definition of future professional prospects. However, in the Russian labor market, older people are often forced to lower their social and professional status. For the employment of pensioners, jobs relating to the category of low-wage and / or low-skilled labor are available.

Today, Russians are between the Asian model of "respect for old age and the elderly" and the European model of meeting personal needs and "deferred expectations." As a result, a modern pensioner in Russia, in most cases, fulfills the role of service personnel in the family or at work.

## Conclusion

In the course of the study it was found that in the modern Russian economic, cultural, social and moral conditions it is impossible to realize the concept of successful aging. A modern citizen of pre-retirement age is constantly in anticipation of this period of life. Some are experiencing certain fears, others are pinning hopes, some are trying to reduce risks and financial discomfort beforehand in connection with the onset of this period of life. It is noted that a change in the status position is not essential for those elderly who retire from managerial positions and posts in the category of "service personnel". The greatest changes in the socioeconomic status are typical for middle-level workers and they also have the most pronounced deformations in the image of the pensioner, affecting changes in relations with relatives, loss of professional status and the discrepancy of expectations with reality.

As a result, the authors confirmed hypotheses about the influence of the existing "culture of caring and helping children" on the decision to stop and continue working activity and about the constant choice of a modern pensioner between work, "caring" and "life for oneself." The hypothesis regarding the concept of successful aging for a Russian pensioner was not confirmed in the course of the study. Since under the current socio-economic conditions of the life of pensioners and the formed image of "service personnel" in society, it is impossible to create conditions for replacing previous social and labor relations with new socio-cultural values.

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