

Old-age stereotypes related to the gerontology education: an intergenerational study

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The aim of this paper is to determine the level of agreement with a series of stereotypes present in our society. These stereotypes are related to sexuality, personality, and cognitive aspects in old people. A sample of 806 people was divided into four groups: youths and older people who had some gerontology education and youths and older people without gerontology education. The analysis carried out shows that gerontology education is extremely relevant to avoid erroneous beliefs about old people. The results reveal the low degree of agreement with the statements: Impotence is usually psychological, but in old men, it is due to age; Old people do not benefit much from education due to their cognitive deficits; Intelligence peaks around the age of 30 and then declines gradually; Sooner or later, old people become senile; Senile people cannot be helped by psychotherapy; Personality is relatively stable in adulthood; and Menopause causes nervous breakdowns.

Key words: Beliefs, youths, elderly, gerontology education.

Estereotipos sobre la vejez y su relación con la formación en gerontología: un estudio intergeneracional. El objetivo de este estudio es conocer el grado de aceptación o de acuerdo, hacia una serie de estereotipos que se encuentran presentes en la sociedad. Dichos estereotipos guardan relación con aspectos, tales como: la sexualidad, la personalidad y los aspectos cognitivos de las personas mayores. Para ello, se seleccionó a una muestra de 806 sujetos, divididos en cuatro grupos: jóvenes y mayores con formación gerontológica, y jóvenes y mayores sin formación gerontológica. De los análisis realizados se desprende, que la educación, en este supuesto, en gerontología, es sumamente relevante para evitar las creencias erróneas hacia las personas mayores, así observamos cómo muestran menor acuerdo con afirmaciones como que la impotencia suele ser psicológica, pero en los viejos es por la edad; por sus muchas carencias, los viejos no pueden servirse de la educación; a los 30 años la inteligencia llega al máximo y luego poco a poco decae; antes o después las personas ancianas se vuelven seniles; No se puede ayudar con psicoterapia a las personas seniles; la personalidad es relativamente estable durante la vida adulta; la menopausia suscita ataques de nervios.

Palabras clave: Creencias, jóvenes, mayores, formación gerontológica.

Because of the obvious aging and continuous change in the population pyramid, the group of elderly people has become very important and, together with education about the real characteristics of this stage of life, this will affect the modification or elimination of the stereotypes or beliefs analyzed in the present research.

There are several beliefs and stereotypes held by groups of young people (Montañés & Latorre, 2004; Zhou, 2007) and even by older people (Chasteen, Schwarz & Parl, 2002), for example, old people are all the same; old people are socially isolated, depressed, difficult to manage and more rigid; they all have some degree of cognitive deterioration, etc.

However, these stereotypes have not been empirically demonstrated in diverse investigations that analyze changes in health, functional skills (Fernández-Ballesteros, 1992), etc., in old people. Some studies have also analyzed the influence of old people's stereotypes on their own behaviors, activities, and their quality of life (Horton, Baker, Côté & Deakin, 2008).

The cognitive changes occurring at these ages have been clearly defined and studied; however, there are a series of beliefs or stereotypes related to the cognitive aspect. The use of terms such as *elderly*, *ancient*, *old*, in other words, the "ageism" of our society, is one of the multiple forms of discrimination made by people from other life stages (Stallar, Decker & Bunnell, 2002; Gázquez, Rubio, Pérez-Fuentes & Lucas, 2008) and reveals a society lacking in humanity towards old people.

A new form of intelligence -*wisdom* (Fernández-Ballesteros, 1999)- is attributed by multiple authors to old people, that is, to old age as the final stage of the developmental cycle (Erikson, 2000; Pinillos, 1992; Shapiro, Sandman, Crossman, & Crossman, 1995). The level of wisdom increases as people age, but let us not forget that a large part of wisdom is related to experience, so old people might be the wisest portion of the population (Baltes & Staudinger, 1993). Intellectual development in old people is distinguished by decadence of fluent intelligence and some increase in crystallized intelligence, whereas the ability to recognize information in the mnemonic performance remains intact (Simón, Ruiz & Suengas, 2009). Specifically, one of the beliefs that refers to cognitive aspects is that most old people have some degree of cognitive impairment (American Psychological Association, 1998).

With regard to aspects related to personality, age was initially associated with negative changes in self-esteem, self-concept, higher degree of internality and passivity, rigidity, and lack of interest in the outside world (Kuhlen, 1959; Mason, 1954). Subsequently, once the stereotypes and beliefs about old age had been dismantled, it was shown that personality tends to remain stable over the years, and changes in some personality dimensions are related to the events experienced throughout people's lives (McCrae & Costa, 1988; Bengtson, Reedy & Gordon, 1985).

In contrast, there are more beliefs or negative stereotypes about old age in aspects related to sexuality because, in this case -as with sexuality in infancy or people with an intellectual disability- it has been energetically stigmatized (García, 2000). According to Figuera (1990), sexual behavior in old age has been regarded as illegitimate, that is, it is not considered appropriate, in contrast to sexuality during other life stages such as youth or maturity, thus producing strong social rejection, as can also occur with sexuality during infancy.

The many erroneous beliefs or stereotypes about old people's sexuality are so generalized that it is commonly thought that ageing involves a loss in sexual interest and sexual capacity until it simply ceases, and these beliefs are even stronger with regard to women, because their female condition is linked to the passing of time. The biological changes derived from the ageing process are not quick and brusque, but gradual (Butler, 1988), usually coinciding with the onset of menopause, but these changes do not lead to the loss of desire and of sexual identity. The ageing process is associated with a series of changes that are typical of this life stage, changes that, once assimilated, do not interfere with the person's capacity to enjoy their sexuality to the full.

Many factors affect the maintenance of beliefs or stereotypes about old people's sexuality, but the role of education should not be forgotten, and a direct relation has been found between the education a person has received and that person's beliefs about sex (Prieto, 2006).

Knowledge of the numerous above-mentioned variables (cognitive, personality, sexuality) through gerontology training or education, along with young people's direct contact or relationship with older people (Abengózar, Cerdá & Pérez, 1999; Cottle & Glover, 2007; Gázquez, Pérez-Fuentes, Lucas & Yuste, 2008) can change this kind of beliefs or stereotypes towards old people as a function of some parameters such as: whether or not the older people have some training in gerontology, and whether or not young people have some training in gerontology. The main aim of this research is to determine the opinion or beliefs about some issues concerning old people as a function of these parameters.

METHOD

Participants

The sample is made up of a total of 806 people of whom 381 (47.3%) are men and 425 (52.7%) are women. They were divided into four groups: 419 young people between 21 and 30 years of age: 202 with gerontological education (mean age 24.3 years) and 217 without gerontological training, (mean age 22.1 years); two groups of older people between 55 and 90 years of age: 182 old people with gerontological training

(mean age 64.6 years) and 205 old people without any gerontological education (mean age 66.1 years).

The young people who had gerontology training had studied the subject Developmental Psychology: Adulthood and Old Age, taught as part of the Psychology Degree in the University of Almería; the old people who had gerontology training had attended the classes of the University Program for Old People, likewise at the University of Almería.

Instrument

The Beliefs about Old Age Questionnaire, elaborated by Yuste and Gázquez, which has a total of 31 items and a Cronbach's alpha or internal consistency of .84. This questionnaire is made up of three factors: the first refers to beliefs related to sexuality and is made up of 10 items; the second factor corresponds to personality aspects (12 items), and the third factor involves beliefs about cognition (9 items). These factors obtained Cronbach's alphas of .72, .62, and .61, respectively. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*).

Procedure

The procedure employed is the habitual one used in Developmental Psychology (Gázquez, Pérez-Fuentes, Lucas & Palenzuela, 2008; Pérez-Fuentes, Yuste, Lucas & Fajardo, 2008). During the 2007-2008 academic course, the Psychology degree students who were in the course Developmental Psychology: Adulthood and Old Age were informed and requested to collaborate by completing the questionnaire. In addition, each student administered the questionnaire to several people over 55 years of age, applying the criteria that these people should not be students of the University Program for Old People of the University of Almería and they should not have any gerontology training. Subsequently, students from other careers of the University of Almería who did not attend any Psychology degree courses were informed about the study being carried out and asked to collaborate and complete the questionnaire. Lastly, we requested the students of the University Program for Old People of the University of Almería at the Vera seat to complete the questionnaire. Once the field work was finished, data was statistically analyzed with the SPSS 11.5 program.

RESULTS

A one-factor ANOVA of the response alternatives was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the level of acceptance of the diverse aspects analyzed by the four groups of participants, which yielded significant

differences in the group means. Subsequently, post hoc Bonferroni comparisons were used to determine the specific groups between which there were differences. Table 1 shows that in practically all the items, the old people without gerontological education obtained higher scores; that is, they agreed to a greater extent with the statements: "Everyone undergoes a mid-life crisis" and "Old men who seek sex are dirty old men" (group differences were observed with regard to the other three groups).

This group, the old people without gerontological education, also expressed more agreement with the following statements: "Most women suffer hot flushes during menopause," "Old people are not interested in sex," and "Most child-abusers are old men," and significant differences were also observed in comparison with the youths and the old people, both with gerontological education.

Table 1. Sexuality area. Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA. Bonferroni test regarding youths and elders with or without gerontology Education

		N	Med.	Sd	F	Sig.	Post Hoc (Bonferroni)		
All people experience the midlife crisis	YWGE	202	1.51	.693	11.244	.000	YWGE-YWTGE *	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.74	.782					
	EWGE	182	1.69	.769					
	EWTGE	205	2.00	.820					
Menopause usually causes nervous attacks	YWGE	202	1.22	.833	15.389	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.74	.822					
	EWGE	182	1.27	1.000					
	EWTGE	204	1.70	.964					
The majority of women suffer hot flushes in the menopause	YWGE	202	1.99	.862	3.796	.010	YWGE-YWTGE	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE *
	YWTGE	217	2.13	.787					
	EWGE	182	1.91	.825					
	EWTGE	205	2.25	.725					
Second marriages between old people usually fail	YWGE	202	.58	.600	36.649	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE **	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.02	.751					
	EWGE	181	1.15	.615					
	EWTGE	205	1.37	1.010					
Old people are not interested in sex	YWGE	202	.78	.676	18.206	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.22	.792					
	EWGE	182	1.00	.742					
	EWTGE	205	1.35	.986					
Old men who look for sex are dirty old men	YWGE	202	.52	.647	59.281	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE **	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.14	.874					
	EWGE	182	.95	.947					
	EWTGE	205	1.71	.925					
Women do not enjoy sex after menopause	YWGE	202	.48	.642	39.085	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE **	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.05	.817					
	EWGE	182	1.17	.997					
	EWTGE	205	1.35	.953					
Men are more interested in sex than women	YWGE	202	1.39	.947	6.273	.000	YWGE-YWTGE	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.63	1.001					
	EWGE	181	1.62	.995					
	EWTGE	205	1.86	1.032					
Most of child abuser are exhibition and old men	YWGE	202	.38	.580	36.723	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE **	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	.94	.744					
	EWGE	182	.85	.792					
	EWTGE	205	1.16	.968					
Impotence is usually psychological, except in old men, when it is more unless inevitable	YWGE	202	1.35	.726	10.326	.000	YWGE-YWTGE **	YWGE-EWGE	YWGE-EWTGE **
	YWTGE	217	1.61	.743					
	EWGE	181	1.57	.741					
	EWTGE	205	1.82	.955					

* The difference in averages is meaningful at level .05.

** The difference in averages is meaningful at level .01.

Differences were also observed between the old people without gerontological education and young people with gerontological education in beliefs such as "Men are more interested in sex than women" and "Impotence is usually psychological, but in old men, it is due to age."

Table 2. Personality area. Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA. Bonferroni test regarding youths and elders with or without gerontology Education

		N	Med.	DT	F	Sig.	Post Hoc (Bonferroni)		
Mothers commonly experience great distress when the last child leaves home	YWGE	202	1.57	.733	8.084	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.83	.854			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.88	.748			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	204	1.96	.921			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]
Work is essential to individual's sense of self worth	YWGE	202	2.29	.636	5.969	.001	[YWGE-	[YWGE-	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	2.14	.760			YWTGE]	EWGE]**	EWTGE]
	EWGE	182	1.91	.825			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	2.07	.893			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]
Retirement is usually traumatic	YWGE	202	1.39	.651	8.023	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.63	.783			YWTGE]*	EWGE]	EWTGE]
	EWGE	182	1.15	.726			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.56	1.008			EWGE]**	EWTGE]*	EWTGE]**
The shock of retirement often results in deteriorating health	YWGE	202	1.16	.695	12.960	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.59	.788			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.25	.799			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.58	.996			EWGE]*	EWTGE]	EWTGE]*
Personality is relatively stable in the adult years	YWGE	202	1.63	.709	12.889	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.86	.586			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.57	.851			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	2.07	.785			EWGE]*	EWTGE]	EWTGE]**
People become more conservative and inflexible during the old age	YWGE	202	1.47	.736	13.328	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.83	.722			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.54	.909			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.96	.864			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]**
Old people become like children	YWGE	202	1.42	.852	13.586	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.75	.885			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.37	.828			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.95	.880			EWGE]**	EWTGE]	EWTGE]**
Old people are harder to motivate than young people	YWGE	202	1.40	.814	8.689	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.49	.776			YWTGE]	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.32	.804			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.84	.939			EWGE]	EWTGE]**	EWTGE]**
Old people are grouchier and get rattled more easily	YWGE	202	1.32	.781	23.800	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.88	.693			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.69	.875			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.93	.883			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]
Old people should keep active to keep their spirits up	YWGE	202	2.21	.649	4.943	.002	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	2.08	.717			YWTGE]	EWGE]	EWTGE]
	EWGE	182	2.41	.628			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	204	2.06	.940			EWGE]**	EWTGE]	EWTGE]**
Old people prefer to reduce the number of their activities and friendships	YWGE	202	.88	.655	22.555	.000	[YWGE-	[YWGE-	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.36	.829			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.15	.937			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	204	1.55	.951			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]**
Because old people are close to death, they turn to religion	YWGE	202	1.37	.860	3.249	.022	[YWGE-	[YWGE-EWGE]	[YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.60	.930			YWTGE]	EWGE]	EWTGE]
	EWGE	180	1.54	.881			[YWTGE-	[YWTGE-	[EWGE-
	EWTGE	205	1.63	.972			EWGE]	EWTGE]	EWTGE]

* The difference in averages is meaningful at level .05.

** The difference in averages is meaningful at level .01.

Lastly, the old people without gerontological education expressed significantly more agreement with the stereotypes "Second nuptials among old people

usually fail" and "After menopause, women do not enjoy sex," in comparison with the two groups of young people with and without gerontological training. Only the youths without gerontological training agreed significantly more with the statement "Menopause causes nervous breakdowns" when compared to the groups of youths and of old people with gerontological education.

As shown in Table 2, the same analysis was performed for the personality factor. In all cases, significant differences were observed among the groups: the old people without gerontological education expressed more agreement with the following beliefs: "Almost all mothers suffer anxiety when their last child leaves home"

Table 3. Cognitive area. Descriptive Statistics and ANOVA. Bonferroni test regarding youths and elders with or without gerontology Education

		N	Med.	DT	F	Sig.	Post Hoc (Bonferroni)		
After 65, the memory is gradually lost	YWGE	202	1.27	.721	9.445	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.34	.879			YWTGE	EWGE	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.47	.838			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.75	.877			EWGE	EWGTGE]**	EWGTGE
A failing memory is the worst problem in old age	YWGE	202	1.73	.733	1.313	.269	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.72	.734			YWTGE	EWGE	EWGTGE
	EWGE	181	1.62	.830			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	204	1.84	.919			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE
In old age, memories of the distant past are clearer and vivid, but memories for recent events are fuzzy	YWGE	202	2.11	.677	61.577	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.17	.836			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.07	.919			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.41	1.005			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE *
Old people have difficulties in learning new rules and techniques	YWGE	202	1.35	.682	.339	.797	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.36	.797			YWTGE	EWGE	EWGTGE
	EWGE	182	1.32	.920			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.43	.909			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE
With all their intellectual deficits, old people do not benefit much from education	YWGE	202	.74	.634	23.695	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.25	.824			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	182	1.25	.830			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.31	.934			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE
Intelligence peaks around the age of 30 and then declined gradually	YWGE	202	.54	.616	22.263	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	.89	.769			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	181	.98	.908			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.19	.922			EWGE	EWGTGE]**	EWGTGE
Old people become senile sooner or later	YWGE	202	1.07	.697	2.736	.043	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.23	.820			YWTGE	EWGE	EWGTGE
	EWGE	182	1.10	.831			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.29	.876			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE
Senile old people cannot be helped by psychotherapy	YWGE	202	.84	.608	14.915	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.10	.691			YWTGE]**	EWGE]**	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	181	1.17	.946			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.38	.904			EWGE	EWGTGE *	EWGTGE
Unmarried people are more susceptible to dementia than married people	YWGE	202	.82	.749	8.960	.000	YWGE-	YWGE-	YWGE-
	YWTGE	217	1.05	.724			YWTGE *	EWGE *	EWGTGE]**
	EWGE	181	1.10	.903			YWTGE-	YWTGE-	EWGE-
	EWGTGE	205	1.27	.943			EWGE	EWGTGE	EWGTGE

* The difference in averages is meaningful at level .05.

** The difference in averages is meaningful at level .01.

(significantly more agreement than youths with gerontological education); " Personality is relatively stable during adulthood," "Old people end up behaving like children," "Old people prefer to reduce the number of activities and friendships" (significant difference with youths and older people with gerontological education), "It is easier to motivate old

people than youths” (significantly higher agreement than the rest of the groups), “Old people are grouchier and they get angry more easily” (significant difference only in comparison with youths with gerontological education), and lastly, “Because old people are nearer to death, they turn to religion (the level of significance was lower than .05, $p \leq .05$) although the post hoc tests did not yield any significant differences).

Lastly, with regard to the cognitive factor, Table 3 shows that the youths both with and without gerontological training expressed significantly more disagreement than did the older people without gerontological training with the following statement: “After 65, people gradually lose their memory.” Compared with the youths without gerontological education and with the two groups of older people, only the youths with gerontological education expressed significantly more disagreement with the statements: “Education cannot benefit old people because of their many cognitive deficits,” “Intelligence peaks around the age of 30 and then declines gradually,” “Sooner or later, old people become senile,” “Senile old people cannot be helped by psychotherapy,” and “Single people are more susceptible to dementia than married people.”

In the remaining cases, we found no significant group differences, although the youths with gerontological education expressed more disagreement with the statements: “Sooner or later, old people become senile,” and the older people with gerontological education expressed more disagreement with the statements: “Old people have trouble learning new rules and techniques” and “A failing memory is the worst problem in old age.”

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the mean scores of the four groups shows that older people without gerontological training express more agreement with most of the stereotypes presented in the questionnaire, followed by the group of youths without gerontological training, whose mean score was significantly higher than that of both the youths and the older people with gerontological education in aspects related to the existence of a mid-life crisis, the nervous consequences of menopause, the beliefs that old men who seek sex are dirty old men, or that most child abusers are old men, and that retirement is usually traumatic and can cause physical and mental deterioration, a relatively stable personality in adulthood, older people's conservatism and inflexibility, and their preference to reduce the amount of activities and friendships.

These differences with the groups who received gerontological education shows that training and education, both of older and younger people, contributes to changing attitudes, beliefs, and *ageism* stereotypes (Ragan & Bowen, 2001), and they confirm Dulcey and Ardila's (1976) statements about differences being a function of the

educational level of the groups, and about how the number of negative stereotypes increases as the educational level drops.

Subsequently, personality was shown to remain stable over time, and the changes in some personality dimensions or factors were found to be related to the events experienced by people during their lifetime, and not a result of their own natural development (McCrae & Costa, 1988; Bengtson, Reedy, & Gordon, 1985), and these aspects are familiar to people who have received gerontological education.

Only the youths and the old people without gerontological training expressed significantly more agreement with the statement "Menopause causes nervous breakdowns" compared to the youths and old people with gerontological education. This again shows that education can affect the modification and rejection of negative beliefs, and that the education received can lead to old people's attitudes about themselves (Prieto, 2006) as well as to youths' attitudes about old people.

In contrast, most of the people in all the groups (youths and older people with and without gerontological training) disagreed with the statement: "Retirement is usually traumatic." Despite the fact that retirement has traditionally been associated with a negative impact on life satisfaction and personal well-being (Elwell & Multbie-Cranell, 1981; Rosse, Aldwin, Levenson, & Eckerdt, 1987), various authors have noted that people who accept retirement as a new start, a stage of rest or continuity in which to undertake experiential leisure activities (Pastor *et al.*, 2003), and not characterized by the presence of emotional suffering but by relatively stable emotional well-being (Márquez-González, Izal, Montorio, & Losada, 2008).

With regard to the sexuality factor, the degree of agreement among the youths and old people without gerontological training was significantly higher for the item "Impotence is usually psychological, but in old men, it is due to age," in comparison to the group of youths with gerontological education. In general terms, the groups with gerontological education understand and accept to a greater extent that older men retain their sexual desire more than their sexual activity, although at times their desire does not correspond with their expected genital reaction, whereas in women, both aspects decrease (Bobes, Dexeus & Gibert, 2000), but this does not mean that women do not enjoy sex.

Lastly, with regard to the cognitive factor, compared to all three of the other groups, only the youths with gerontological education disagreed significantly with the following statements: "Education cannot benefit old people because of their many cognitive deficits," "Intelligence peaks around the age of 30 and then declines gradually," "Sooner or later, old people become senile," and "Single people are more susceptible to dementia than married people".

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