

GRANDCHILDREN'S VIEWS OF OLD AGE AND AGING: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF 7-11-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN***Sadguna Anasuri**

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Abstract

The current study examined the views and attitudes of school-age children aged 7 to 11 regarding older people and aging. These children are distinguished by the fact that they were raised by their grandparents, and they have lived in the same household with their current family members for more than a year. The researcher had been inspired to explore the perspectives of children who lived with the older generation(s) due to changing demographic patterns and circumstances in modern American society. Phenomenological and qualitative research methodologies were employed to investigate children's opinions and perspectives regarding older people and aging. The methodology includes the children creating two drawings, interpreting their drawings, a sentence completion task, and an informal talk with the researcher. In contrast to stereotypes, the findings of this study revealed largely favorable impressions and attitudes toward older people, as well as highly distinct thoughts on aging.

Keywords: Grandchildren, Grandparents, Perceptions, Attitudes, Co-resident, Older, Aging.

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the American population, such as increased life expectancy and advancements in health technology, have resulted in over 5.7 million people over 65 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Growing aging populations necessitate good, empathetic opinions and attitudes among younger generations who will be future carers. Such an increase in population is expected to continue, necessitating the need to prepare the next generation to deal with and manage this unavoidable predicament. Children develop opinions and attitudes based on their observations of people and objects around them from an early age. The current study sought to investigate and comprehend these perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward the older population. Societal changes often influence alterations in the family composition. Increased lifespan and availability of technological advancements make it easier to communicate and travel to stay in contact with extended families. The number of individuals aged 50 and above is projected to increase by 76% by 2020, while those aged 65 and above would increase by 20% by the year 2030, and a large portion of these numbers would include the "fast-growing 85+ category" (Moody, 1998 p. 5). This age distribution pattern was called "population aging" (p. 5). Over the past century, the median age has increased from 17 (in 1820) to 23 (in 1900) to 33 (in 1990) and was projected to increase to 36 (by the end of the century) and 42 by 2030. Three main reasons for this population aging trend were declining birthrates, increasing life expectancy, and increasing out-migration of the younger generation (Moody). As a result of such trends, almost three out of four older people in the United States have at least one living grandchild. Four out of five of those who have grandchildren have seen a grandchild during the past week; more than half have seen a grandchild in the last 24 hours.

Grandparents raising grandchildren is "an increasingly prevalent family constellation" (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). In 2000, over 5.7 million co-resident grandchildren-grandparent families were identified (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003); 2.4 million were raising their grandchildren. During 1990 - 2000, there has been 30% growth in number of children living in households run by grandparents (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler & Driver, 1997; U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Recent numbers from U.S. Census Bureau indicate that 5.8 million grandchildren live with their grandparents, either in grandparents' homes (3.8 million) or parent's homes (1.7 million) (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

Studies in past decades have shown varying images of older persons as perceived by young children (Hodgson, 1992; Jantz, 1976; Jantz, Seedfeldt, Galper & Serock, 1977; McTavish, 1971; Marks, Newman & Onawala, 1985). Berns (2004) elucidated that children learn their attitudes from socializing agents and are acquired through adults in their microsystem and mesosystem surrounding the families. Direct experiences at home, school, church, and community facilities through instruction and modeling by adult members help the children learn and instill attitudes about people around them. It was evident from research that attitudes affect the behaviors of people. "Behavior is what one does or how one acts in response to a stimulus" (Berns, 2004). Frequently children viewed physical and behavioral characteristics as a basis for categorizing older persons. Many studies recorded negative attitudes held by children toward older generations (Jantz, Seedfeldt, Galper & Serock, 1977; McTavish, 1982; Treybig, 1974). Middle school children held common stereotypes and misconceptions of older persons as inactive and having fewer adult roles, while others mentioned neutral views. Overall, prejudice was noticed in children's opinions about older generations (McTavish, 1971). Usually, these emotional states are considered prior causes of society's treatment of older

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people, affecting the well-being of aged persons. A renewed interest in methods to detect such ageist perceptions has emerged to identify target groups for treatment and measure the effectiveness of programs designed to change these attitudes. Research in this area was significant in the current era of social changes and demographic variations. With an ever-increasing number of older adults, the United States is undergoing remarkable demographic changes (Laney, Laney, Wimsatt & Moseley, 1996). By 2020, it is projected that one in three Americans will be over 50 (American Association of Retired Persons, 1994 & 1995). Educators face the challenge of preparing the younger generation for these demographic changes' political, social, and economic effects.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions and attitudes toward older persons and the concept of aging in 7–11-year-old school children as depicted through their drawings, descriptions of their drawings, and follow-up informal conversations. Family Science professionals must systematically understand differences in views about older generations, which will constitute a major part of society soon. Such explicit information would guide child development professionals in preparing the younger generations to handle the aging societies in the future.

Rationale for the Study

In the current situation of growing numbers of older people, increasing years of lifespan, changes in family structure and composition, the importance of studying perceptions and attitudes of the younger generation toward more senior people, and particular emphasis on grandchildren raised by grandparents necessitate the present study. Besides these reasons, a significant shortage of studies in this area calls for the current study.

Age Group of Sample

Piaget's theory of cognitive stages of development suggests that by age 7, children are developmentally able to form concrete thoughts and perceive their surroundings, including people and objects around them. By age 11, children are projected to move into the formal operations stage, in which they formulate strong attitudes and perceptions about elements in the surroundings. Piaget found that children can perform "mental rotations" in which they can match the alignment of themselves with objects around them. During the age of 8-10, children can produce a "mental walk" of scenes, routes, and layout of people and objects in their view or not (Berk, 2006 p. 243). This ability was evident in the drawings made by the children in the present study. Another feature of school-age children crucial for the study was "cognitive maps," corresponding to "mental representations of large-scale space" children see daily. Children's drawings can use landmarks, people, objects, and neighborhood spaces. Middle childhood was marked for developing skills related to reading and drawing maps and layouts that connect imagination and reality (Berk, 2006, p. 243). Participants' narratives helped to understand the meaning and relations children will attach to the elements in their drawings. This cognitive developmental ability was anticipated to be noticeable in school-age children under study.

Attitudes and Perceptions in Children

For several reasons, studying school children's attitudes toward older persons was essential. First, the aging population was projected to increase in the coming years, and children would need to know and understand how to accommodate this generation. Increased awareness and contact with such populations would help children to be more sensitive and prepared for such times during different stages of their lifespan. Second, the attitudes gained in the early years remain stable, enduring influences throughout one's life (Allport, 1935; Cohen, 1993; Klausmeier, 1971). Children's attitudes and stereotypes develop early and remain reasonably constant, directing their behavior toward others (Klausmeier, 1971). Negative attitudes of younger generations have far-reaching implications. Third, it has also been found that timing in forming perspectives is essential and can have a long-lasting impact on children (Hoe, 1998; Hoe & Davidson, 2002).

Children's Drawings

The choice of drawings to analyze children's attitudes was based on research that explains cognitive development and social cognition elements. According to Piaget (1977), children represent their surroundings in their drawings using their schema of the objects and people. This symbolic representation depicts their cognitive development and social intelligence (Gardner, 1980). Visual awareness and consciousness of details and proportion improve by the age of 9 or 10 years (Lowenfeld, 1988). Art objects, according to Creswell (2003) and Daly (2007), are considered to be "an obtrusive" way of gathering information. It was understood that through art, participants "share their reality directly" (Creswell, p. 187). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) stated that social scientific research needs to explore the meanings the individuals assign to their actions besides observing human activities. Children's reflections on their knowledge and beliefs through drawings, descriptions of their drawings, open-ended sentence completion, and informal conversations were used to understand the concept of aging and ageism comprehensively.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE STUDY

It is assumed that children in this study live in a setting that calls for understanding possible factors and influences of demographic, social, familial and personal factors in forming perceptions and attitudes toward older persons and views about aging. These factors are represented in Figure 1.

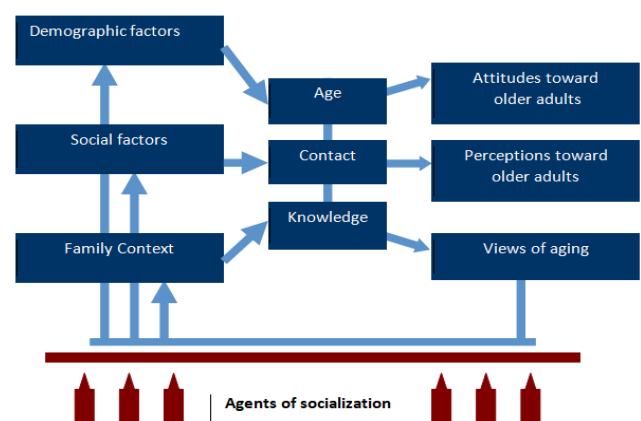


Figure 1. Conceptual Model for the Study

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of 7-11-year-old school-age children toward older generations and aging?
2. What are the attitudes of 7-11-year-old school-age children toward older generations and aging?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development in children ages 7 – 11 of age goes through developmental stages and changes. The proposed study was based on the foundations of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and Piaget's cognitive theory. The phenomenological approach was employed to understand children's attitudes and perceptions about older persons.

Ecological Theory

The ecological theory views the child as developing within a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate family and school settings to broad cultural values and programs (Berk, 2006, p. 27). Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) put forth an approach that differentiated the impact of contextual factors in the development of children. Since the child's biological disposition constantly interacts with environmental forces that shape evolution, Bronfenbrenner recently characterized his perspective as a bio-ecological model. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model explains that agencies of socialization, such as family, community, school, peer group, media, mass communication, state and national policies, religious institution, and parents' workplace, influence children's knowledge, awareness, and perceptions of objects and people around them. Each agency can have an impact individually or in combination with others, leading to framing attitudes in young children. Family values and opinions concerning older adults define parameters of the ecosystem that influence children's minds (Berk, 2006).

Cognitive Developmental Theory

According to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, by the age of seven, most children enter into a stage of concrete operations. This stage was the beginning of understanding the environment in present and immediate realities (Piaget & Inhelder, 1971). By age 11, children are likely to advance into another stage called formal operations, which is known to include more abstract thinking and comprehension. Concepts about people and objects not in their immediate environment make it difficult for the concrete age group; it becomes less complicated during the formal stage (Berk, 2004).

The current study proposes to explore children's views during the concrete operations stage and examine their knowledge and perceptions of older persons. When art was viewed as a process children use to signify and reconstruct their environment, "the process of making drawings becomes much more involved than a mere attempt at visual representation" (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1975, p. 52). Lowenfeld and Brittain further explained that young children are simultaneously involved in every drawing; they are spectators and actors. Piaget (1959) discovered that cognitive development stages closely parallel drawing development. The complexity and sophistication of drawings emerge and refine over the school years. The proposed study was based on the premise that children's verbalizations improve with concrete objects, like

drawings and stems of sentences in front of them, rather than thinking from abstract elements (Piaget, 1977). Artwork was a natural technique of data collection that reflects a child's point of view in a natural form, which was an essential element of the phenomenological method.

Phenomenological Theory

Phenomenology was a term used to describe the tradition within the social sciences related to understanding the framework of an individual's orientation (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1994) also highlighted the process as "understanding of lived experiences through detailed descriptions of people being studied" (p. 12). The investigator collects extensive data from the participant sample directly in a familiar environment for the sample. The advantage of this method was to seek information in natural settings as it happens to participants' perspectives. This definition helps explain the technique's value in studying the meanings of children's drawings in their natural settings. Children living with their grandparents are an example of a natural environment that allows further inquiry. These theoretical perspectives, along with the drawings as the medium for communication, provide a richness of data not easily obtained solely from quantitative investigation.

METHODOLOGY

The present section describes the study's methods, including the research's style and design. It was organized into eight major sections - 1) selection of subjects, 2) rationale for methodology, 3) description of instruments, 4) protection of human subjects, 5) design of the study, 6) data collection, 7) steps to ensure methodological rigor, and 8) analysis procedures. The purpose of 'descriptive research' is to describe the characteristics or behaviors of a given group. Further details and descriptions of data collection and analyses mentioned in this chapter are provided in the appendices section.

Selection of Sample

The sample for the study consisted of school-age children residing in the North Texas region that lived with grandparents or have lived with grandparents for at least six months in the past year. Children were in the age range of 7 to 11 years. This age was chosen to parallel the concrete operations developmental stage described by Piaget (1977). The sample was from children who attended public schools, private schools, camps, recreational facilities, childcare centers, and after-school programs. A purposive sampling of 18 children was selected based on these criteria. The grandparents were contacted, informed about the study, and offered an opportunity for their grandchildren to participate.

Rationale for Methodology

The research topic chosen for the current study necessitated understanding the meanings children place on the concepts of aging and older persons. As an alternative to relying on standardized tests and measurement scales, a qualitative approach with a combination of methods was used to explore the attitudes and perceptions of school-age children. A brief rationale for selecting the current methodology is presented here.

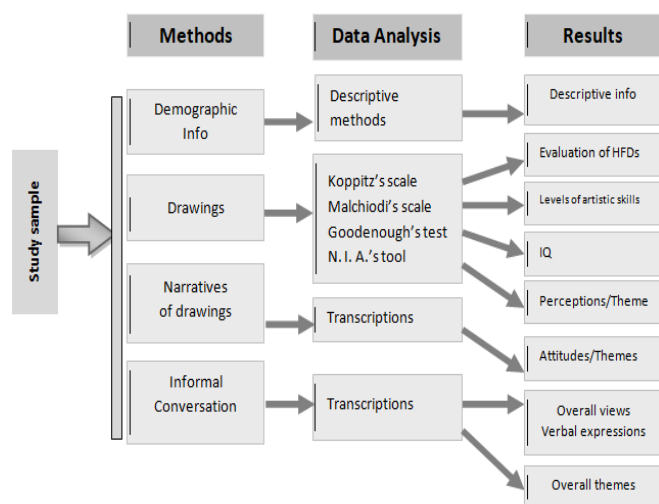


Figure 2. Overview of Methods, Data Analysis, and Results of the Study

Qualitative Methods

A qualitative approach was employed to explore the children's natural expression through artwork. The limitations of children's verbal and written descriptions were supplemented with data obtained from drawings by children. Drawing pictures allowed communication of complicated feelings to verbalize (Cox, 1993; Koppitz, 1968; Malchiodi, 1998). Piaget and Inhelder (1971) found that children could not developmentally engage in nonrepresentational thinking until around 11. The current study employed children's drawings as the primary medium of expression, supplemented with verbal descriptions of children's attitudes and views about older persons. Narratives about their drawings, sentence-completion tasks, and informal conversations let children verbalize their attitudes and perceptions differently. Thus, symbolic and linguistic methods were used in the study to obtain extensive and rich data.

Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological methodology focuses on meanings, perceptions, and attitudes. In this study, it has allowed examination of children who were living with their grandparent(s) or have lived with grandparent(s) for at least six months in the past year; hence, using the contextual method, this study revealed natural thoughts, ideas, and attitudes about concepts related to older adults. Subjective meanings that children give to their artwork, not preconceived beliefs, expectations, or background (Giorgi *et al.*, 1971), were the primary basis for this kind of research. The phenomenological approach also provided scope for recognizing different aspects of art expression—cognitive abilities, emotional development, interpersonal skills, and developmental maturity. This "integral orientation rather than limited perspective" offered the best way to understand the expression of young minds (Malchiodi, 1998, p. 99).

Children's Drawings

Machover's (1949) Draw-A-Person projective test and work on personal projection in human figure drawings is well known. It influences almost all research on clinical applications of human figure drawings. Her conceptual framework is based on the belief that "...a human figure drawn by an individual who

is directed to 'draw a person' relates intimately to that individual's impulses, anxieties, conflicts, and compensation characteristic. In some sense, the figure drawn is the person, and the paper corresponds to the environment" (p. 35). Lowenfeld (1988) discovered children's intellectual growth is connected to creative development and delineated a sequence of predictable stages of artistic development. Lowenfeld saw the value of art in self-expression:

"The process of drawing, painting or constructing is complex in which the child combines diverse elements of his environments to make a meaningful whole. In selecting, interpreting, and reforming these elements, he has given us more than a picture; he has given us a part of himself" (p. 1).

Narratives of Drawings

Symbolic representations of attitudes can be more fully captured by including children's drawings and their verbal descriptions of these drawings. Thus, errors possible during human analysis can be minimized. Combining analysis of the children's drawings with their narrations of the illustrations helped to understand the true meanings that children have toward older persons and aging. It was assumed that children might not be able to draw everything they have in their minds. At the same time, the human factor involved in analyzing the drawings may not provide the complete meaning depicted through drawings. When children were asked to describe what they see in their pictures, the details, intentions, and perceptions of older persons and their characteristics were revealed.

Informal Conversations

External pressure from being observed or tested may cause the child to perform and not be their authentic self. Children may find it invasive for strangers to ask questions about them and their families. The researcher spent time with each child before the interview to reduce this intrusive factor. This initial rapport time helped minimize the anxiety of being interviewed and observed while drawing. The uneasiness related to talking about their drawings was another factor kept in mind. Initial rapport and prior explanation of the procedures relaxed the children and helped them do their best work at drawings, describing their drawings, doing sentence-completion tasks, and having informal conversations.

Team of Scorers

A team of scorers proficient in child development scored the data collected from various instruments. The group consisted of three members, including the researcher. It assisted in coding the data and interpreting the scores on the following tools: (a) Demographic form, (b) Goodenough's and Harris drawing test, (c) Koppitz's evaluation of children's human figure drawings (HFDs), (d) Malchiodi's scale of artistic development, (e) National Institute on Aging (N. I. A.) 's drawing analysis tool, and (f) follow-up conversation transcripts. Teams of scorers were trained in scoring the above-listed instruments; instructions and samples were provided for handy reference. Instructions for scoring based on the original manuals and scripts from the authors were used. The scorers provided input about the scores, themes, and patterns observed in the data.

Table 1. Details of primary caretakers as given by the participants

Child #	Caretaker(s)	# of caretakers at home	Gender of caretaker(s)	Perceived age of caretaker(s)
1	Grandparents	2	1 M 1 F	57 57
2	Grandparents	2	1 M 1 F	57 57
3	Grandparents	1	1 F	60s
5	Grandparents	2	1M 1F	55 55
6	Grandparents Step grandparents	4	2M 2F	60s 50s
7	Grandparents	2	1M 1F	60s 60s
8	Grandparents Nana	3	2F 1M	60 85
9	Grandparents Older grandmother	3	2F 1M	60 60 85
10	Grandma	1	1F	36+
11	Grandmas	2	2F	57 50s
12	Grandma Nana	2	2F	60 70
13	Grandma	1	1F	54
14	Grandma Grandpa	2	1F 1M	54 50s
15	Grandma	1	1F	70-80
16	Grandma	1	1F	60-63
17	Big mama	1	1F	60-63
18	Granny	1	1F	55

Note. The ages of grandparents were perceptions reported by the participants, with some errors left uncorrected.

Age, Gender, and Ethnicity

The sample consisted of 12 girls and eight boys, aged between 7 and 11 years. There were six each in 7- and 11-year-old groups, while there were 2 in each of the 8-, 9-, and 10-year-old groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the Sample by Ethnicity, Gender, and Age

Ethnicity	Gender	Number of participants	Ages (in years)
African American	F	7	7, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 11
	M	3	10, 11, 11
Asian	M	1	11
	F	1	7
Hispanic	F	2	7, 8
White	F	2	7, 11
	M	2	7, 11
Total		n = 18	

Data Collection Process

A total of 18 children participated in the study. Each child was contacted via their grandparent(s), who were provided with a brief overview of the purpose and methods of the analysis. The sample was collected via various sources, including senior centers, senior news magazines, recreational centers for children, and word-of-mouth. This section consists of interviews, descriptions of participants, and synopsis of interviews.

Length of Interviews

The interview sessions were intended to take 40-50 minutes in total. The session consisted of initial rapport time, collecting demographic information, creation of drawings, sentence completion activity, and informal conversation.

The shortest interview lasted 35 minutes, while the longest took 60 minutes, for an average length of 48 minutes. (see Figure 2).

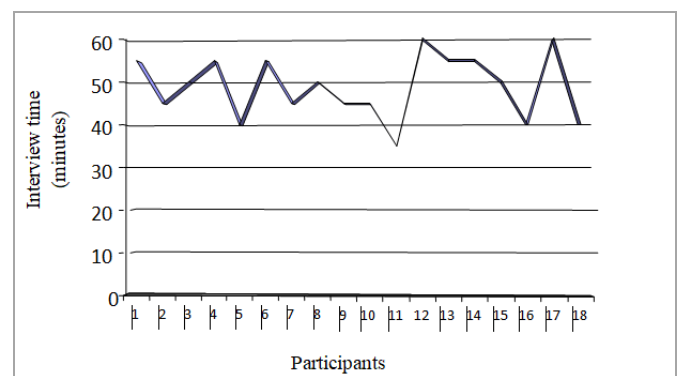


Figure 2.

Methods of Data Analysis

All the audio tapes were transcribed verbatim. The researcher coded the data by recognizing the repeating themes and emerging patterns of responses. The drawings were analyzed using four styles of evaluation: Koppitz's, Malchiodi's, Goodenough's, and Lichtenstein's scales. At this point, the researcher contacted peer evaluators. Two graduate students majoring in child development assisted in evaluating a sample of the data. The two peer evaluators analyzed the drawings, transcriptions, and answers to sentence completion activity of 2 participants. Then a peer de-briefer was approached who acted as a sounding board to discuss the data analysis and conclusions. The results of the data analyses are presented in fewer than three main categories: drawings, sentence-completion and informal conversation.

RESULTS

Participants made two drawings each: one about what came to their mind when they heard the words old or older persons. The second picture was about what came to their mind when they listened to the words grandparents, grandmother, or grandfather. Both drawings were made on 11" X 17" white card stock paper using a pencil, crayons, and an eraser. A few participants talked during the drawing, while others waited till the end to describe the contents of the picture. These verbal explanations of their drawings gave the researcher greater insight into the figures and the meanings children attached to each element. Drawings constituted a variety of contexts and members in different actions and sequences. Narratives described other parts of the illustrations, what they indicated, and why it was necessary to draw them there. Sometimes, a full page colored in gray meant a storm, while a few lines on the side of the house meant a sidewalk. Ingredients of the drawings were many times out of proportion; for example, the Sun was as big as the house or a bird or bee was more prominent than a dog or a cat, fingers were more noticeable than the whole hand itself, of shoulders more enormous than the total hand or body, or neck is just as striking as someone's body. Verbal narratives clarified the elements, the context, their relationship, and any past or future indications surrounding the drawing. Each ingredient of the picture represented a significant element like hairstyle, relatives, rituals, dialogue/messages, and postures of people, hearts to represent love, household objects, weather, Sun, birds, butterflies, grass, flowers, windows, and stairs.

In some drawings, the people were drawn partially (with fewer details or only till the neckline or waistline). Pets were significant items in many drawings. The most common emotional expression was a smile or happiness; one picture showed a crying scene. Notably, all the drawings had people doing activities, except one drawing where the grandmother was lying in the bed. Drawings depicted certain recent events in participants' lives, such as a storm that week, an outing they went to, sports activities they participated in, mowing lawns, and visiting the park. Children often drew people and objects that existed in their lives, except in a few cases, when a boy drew a picture of his father whom he had never seen. In another instance, the child drew how their lawn would look in the future, representing the beginnings of abstract thinking even at such young ages (7 -9 years). In some other pictures, there were no human beings but included older persons' objects, vehicles, or workplaces.

Table 3. Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Personal qualities	Nice Generous Kind Wise
Aging	More birthdays Grown-up
Societal consciousness	Could use help Take care of them.
Social life/style	Have fun Free time
Animals/pets	Aging among pets Raising baby animals
Non-human/objects	Oldness Old objects Storage

Personal qualities

In most cases, children had positive or neutral attitudes toward the older population. The standard descriptions that children used for the older generation were as being "nice," "generous," "kind," and "wise." Children aged 7-11 are beginning to develop initial perceptions and attitudes toward environmental factors, especially those around them. They, however, may not have produced any stereotypes by this age (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2003). Results from the current study support earlier research and indicate a chance for shaping children's attitudes and views during this crucial stage of childhood.

Aging

For children, older meant "growing up" and "having more birthdays." This sense of progression of time was observed more often in younger children (7-8 years) than the older group of children (9-11 years). Children often relate old for getting older every year or other children more senior than themselves. It was notable that at this age, even when living with their grandparents, children did not associate oldness with aged and older adults. Instead, they were reminded of cousins or siblings or themselves when they grew up.

Societal consciousness

Children at this age of late elementary and early middle school were found to possess ideas of social consciousness and spoke about helping and caring for older people. Children mentioned how their grandparents looked after them and how it is their responsibility to, in turn, take care of their grandparents. Children included comments like, "... could use help," which described an understanding of the needs of aging and how they could be of any assistance.

Social life/style

Children saw the aged persons as primarily free and having a fun time. In the co-residing situation, too, children perceived their caretaker-cum-grandparents as those who not only had plenty of free time and spent life in enjoyment. In the drawings, grandparents took children to parks and rides and played with them. During initial rapport time and informal conversations, children described the lifestyle of their grandparents as those with a leisurely yet active life.

Animals/pets

Most children's drawings, narrations, and conversations included animals and pets. Dogs, cats, Hermit crabs, and birds were part of children's lives as pets at home or in their neighborhood. Children related oldness to the aging in animals that they knew and recalled how they aged over the years. Some children even described the characteristics of these pets and how they changed over the years. Environmental elements are often taken for granted and thus seem to impact children's minds significantly. So large that children recalled animals and pets instead of old grandparents when they heard the words old and older person.

Non-human/objects

Another exciting association that children made was about non-human things and objects. Children sometimes were

reminded of old things they saw or knew when hearing the words old or older person. In such instances, children recalled old, "rusty" objects stored in the attic and things that were not used anymore. Some examples of this type were "old mirror," "rusty chair," "box of old shoes," and other objects that were stored away. Once, a child said, "Old is something that is not new." These responses reiterate that children do not immediately think of older people when they hear the words old or older.

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Children raised by grandparents and living in the same household had specific views toward older persons and aging. These views were possibly influenced by their continuous contact with their older caregivers and observing and knowing them personally.
2. Based on their drawings, most children (n=10) from this study sample were grouped into IQ scores of 85 – 135, which indicated the typical developmental stage and intellectual period of these children (Koppitz, 1968). Since these numbers coincide with regular and average IQ scores, the sample can be regarded as drawn from average and typical families, which further endorsed and justified the distribution of the sample under study.
3. Children's narratives of the drawings provided insights into the child's minds and views regarding older persons. Representation via pictures, positive associations, remarks, and statements highlighted children's perceptions of aging and the aging population.
4. Themes depicted through the drawings and narrations showed that these children have positive and neutral attitudes toward senior citizens. With no negative overall impressions, around 92% of the remarks were positive, while 8% were neutral. Such overwhelmingly positive views of children describe these families' social and emotional conditions and children in particular.
5. Living with grandparents provided these grandchildren a close look at older persons' lifestyles and personalities. This led to the development of an understanding of the older generation, which in turn led to more positive attitudes toward them. Continued contact and care provided by the grandparents led to positive outlooks and views among grandchildren raised by these elderly folks.
6. Within the limited sample used for the study, boys and girls conveyed slightly different views toward aged persons. Girls expressed sensitive personal qualities like "nice" and "kind," while boys used more evident and tangible characteristics like "wise" and "generous."
7. A slight variation was found in the artistic and intellectual ability of 7-8 year-olds and 9-11 year-olds. This was evident in their drawings and descriptions of the pictures. Younger groups talked more about "growing up" and "having more birthdays," while older children expressed thoughts about possible "help" and "care" for the older generation. This only described the maturational features among different age groups, how young children are more egocentric than older children, and how the older children think beyond themselves and start looking at others' perspectives.
8. These drawings can be examined closely with various other measures and using different styles to know more about their perceptions of aging and aged people. For example, the use of gender, ethnicity, and color in the drawings, the

size and proportion of the pictures, any words written on the drawing, and details of the figures drawn can provide an opportunity for in-depth probing and understanding of children's psychological and emotional maturity besides intellectual development.

9. Children expressed their opinions and thoughts about the older generation through drawings and descriptions. Giving them multiple opportunities to communicate their views allowed them to collect data from different sources and media. Children, who were not artistically skilled, conveyed their ideas during the narrations about their drawings. Children further articulated their viewpoints in sentence-completion activity and informal conversation time.
10. The study represented the current living conditions of such families, where grandparents raised grandchildren, and how this situation resulted from social, economic, and other reasons. During the initial rapport and final informal conversations, children disclosed information about the presence of their parents, their whereabouts, and how that resulted in their current living with their grandparents. Most 9-11 year-olds viewed this as a blessing since the grandparents came to their rescue, while some other children were not clear about how and why grandparents raised them and not their parents.

Earlier studies considered knowledge, contact, whether single or multiple contact with older people as a factor influencing children's views toward older persons (Fox & Giles, 1993; Horgan & Fees, 2002; Lowenthal & Egan, 1991; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002; Russell, Die, & Walker, 1986; Schwalbach & Kiernan, 2002; Ward, 1997). However, in the current study, living in the same household can be considered as having contact continuously. In such cases, having positive views among these children could be somewhat predictable. On the contrary, framing opposite opinions could also be possible. Previous researchers such as Kremer (1988), Povlsen, Mellemgard & Coninck-Smith (1999), and Seefeldt (1987a, 1987b, & 1989) have noticed that prolonged exposure or contact of children with ailing and sick older people led to the formation of negative impressions toward older generations. To complement these findings, a coding tool was developed by National Institute of Aging (N. I. A.) (as cited in Lichtenstein, *et al.*, 2003) to evaluate the drawings. Among the physical characteristics, white or gray hair was mentioned almost by 30% of the participants; 64% described them as pretty/handsome, 80% presented a smile, 86% showed a happy emotion, and 89% depicted kind/nice in their drawings. On cognitive and health areas, 70% mentioned wise/wisdom, and 81% said the figures in their pictures were healthy, firm, or had no problems. Only one drawing had a cane/walker and wheelchair, while 2 had crutches, and 4 included eyeglasses. The most common recreational activities expressed in the drawings were babysitting and playing with grandkids (64%). Overall impression of the illustrations or descriptions was positive (92%) among the drawings.

DISCUSSION

Children's perspectives about older persons were personal and unique in the current sample due to age group and living conditions. The sample consisted of children ages 7 to 11 years, coinciding with Piaget's concrete operational period of cognitive development. Children were expected to portray their perceptions and attitudes toward older persons at this age

capably. The attitudes and perceptions were complex manifestations of elements like knowledge of older adults, contact with an older generation, views of aging, child's demographic characteristics, sociocultural factors, and cognitive developmental level of children. Coresidence with older adults, namely grandparents in the current case, accounts for knowledge of and contact with older adults since the children lived such an experience living in the same household. Demographic factors were included because the family size and composition, socioeconomic status, and overall physical health state (as reported by children) were intended to provide necessary information about the family and their societal standing. The cognitive developmental level of children was estimated using the scores from Goodenough & Harris's (1950) draw-a-person test and Koppitz's (1968) evaluation of drawings for expected and exceptional items. Artistic ability and corresponding cognitive levels were assigned using Malchiodi's stages of artistic development. Children's external reality of objects, people, and other tangible and concrete experiences around them was depicted via their drawings, descriptive narrations, and information conversations. During the initial rapport time and final informal conversation time, children openly expressed their inner feelings and thoughts regarding this topic.

Earlier studies were conducted in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, and several societal changes happened during the past four decades. Advancing technology in communication methods that led to connecting and maintaining relationships among extended family members were noteworthy (Casper & Suzanne, 2002; Haught, Walls, Laney, Leavell & Stuzen, 1999; Hodgson, 1992; King & Elder, 1995; King, Russell & Elder, 1998; Rich, Myrick & Campbell, 1983). In addition, increased lifespan and health conditions led to many more senior citizens living in the society (Aday, Aday, Arnold & Bendix, 1996; Uhlenberg, 1998). Even though the drift today is toward early retirement, people working after 65 years in part-time jobs have increased considerably (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000a, 2000b & 2003). Due to a multiple reasons, more children are being raised by grandparents living in the same household than ever before. According to the latest reports, this condition was found in 5.8 million families headed by grandparents and with middle-generation or parents missing from the scene (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003).

Salient predictors of attitudes among the current sample can be a combination of knowledge, contact or exposure, and living experiences. Of the three listed, lived experiences seemed to have a greater influence on the framing of perceptions and, thus, attitudes and views about older persons and aging. Co-residing with their grandparents, these children have learned to understand, cope with and tolerate the styles of the older population. The reasons leading to this condition seemed to influence children's perceptions. Lived experiences of these children can propel them to search for meanings of objects and people. Also, with parents missing from the picture, children regarded the older folks as those who rescued them from vulnerability. This was evident during informal conversations with the children. Having enough rapport with the sample helped the researcher probe into their inner feelings and find some sensitive information. It can be assumed that holding multiple sessions with the sample might provide more significant insights into these children's complex perceptions, attitudes, and views toward the older generation and aging.

The current study explored perceptions, attitudes, and views of 7 to 11-year-old school-age children toward older persons and aging. In recent decades the changing family structures have made professionals aware of the current complex situations and possible implications. Grandparents raising grandchildren has been a phenomenon observed in certain cultures for a long time, but in developed countries like the United States, this has become a recent trend, with 5.8 million children living with their grandparents and grandparents being the heads of households in such cases, necessitated the Census Bureau to create a new type of family structure in their questionnaire using questions 19a, 19b, and 19c. This was required due to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, approved in the 104th Congress (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003). With lifespan increasing to over 75 years and baby boomers numbering over 80 million this year, it calls for increased awareness and alertness regarding this new population group. It benefits younger generations to have favorable views of older persons and the aging process. It was thus recognized that knowing the perceptions and attitudes of school-age children was a significant subject.

The research emphasized that changing perceptions of the younger generation toward aging helps to move beyond cognitive learning and gain a balanced attitude about aging (Langer, 1999). Children develop attitudes during early ages, and some of these attitudes are difficult to change in the following years (Allport, 1935; Klausmeier, 1971). These attitudes often remain stable, and timing can also be important in having a long-lasting impact on children (Hoe, 1998; Hoe & Davidson, 2002). Increasing knowledge among young and school-age children can help teach positive views about the older generation and the aging process. Based on the current study's findings, recommendations for family life educators, school teachers, instructors in all child-related fields, researchers and families in general are described below.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Family life education

With knowledge of children's perceptions, family life educators can direct the children's views toward positive styles and thus help create an optimistic environment in future society. Intergenerational programs were found to be successful in inculcating a positive outlook toward aging and older people (Cohen, 1989; Crites, 1989; Couper & Pratt, 1999; Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2001, 2003, 2005; Vandervan, 1999; Ward, 1997). Families, including every age, gender, and ethnicity, must be enlightened about the growing numbers of the older population and sufficient preparation of citizens. Education of grandparents through several sources and media helps keep them updated on the latest technology, multicultural matters, intervention, policies, laws, and custody issues related to grandchildren (Chenoweth, 2000; Hayslip & Patrick, 2003; Kornhaber, 2004). Even though a perfect model is not available for this group, coresident grandparents can be educated about modern child-rearing methods (Hayslip, Shore, Henderson & Lambert, 1998). Grandparents can recognize child development needs through education, training, support groups, and intervention. Such awareness portrays a positive image for children, who will then see proficient caregivers, influencing their perceptions of older adults.

School Teaching and Curriculum

With children spending their prime time at school, teachers are responsible for constructing a clear understanding of the aging population through detailed curriculum and instruction. Such education can help dispel negative perceptions and views toward the group. Designing educational programs and curriculum for schools are expected to induce an understanding of the aging process and positive perceptions about the older generation. Positive Aging (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 1999, 2001, 2003 & 2005) is one such curriculum in use currently. More such programs can be created or customized to suit local needs nationwide to help prepare the younger generations in this regard. National Academy developed a guide for aging education for K-12 and other instructional material for Teaching and Learning about Aging (NATLA). This consisted of 25 aging-related concepts linked to thematic strands of social studies, such as demographics of aging, social, political, and economic aspects of aging, and the aging process (Couper, Pratt & Laney, 1999). Public school teachers were found to "obtain their ideas from teaching institutes, workshops, ideas and lessons they develop themselves, and periodicals" on aging (Wimsatt, 2001). Opportunities to learn about older people may not be limited to school health education. Such information may be included in English essays, history projects on legendary people, biology and science assignments based on cellular growth and development, mathematics problems on family economics using a budget, and Social Security benefits. Even trips to nursing homes and nursing homes for community service or assistance to aid organizations helping older people can provide younger people to watch the senior citizens closely and interact with them.

Instruction in child-related fields

Child development professionals who work with children must become aware of the topic and ensure they include such research and study materials in their teaching at the college and university level. Education in health, especially about gerontology health, can help teach children and adolescents about aging, adult fitness, and health promotion and maintenance. Such knowledge can also help youngsters understand the causes of morbidity and mortality in old age and that some of those conditions depend on their current lifestyles. The primary goals of such education can prepare children for an aging society of the future and to handle their aging process with greater understanding and planning.

Family Counseling

Families that gain knowledge and become aware of children's perceptions and attitudes toward older citizens of the nation help prepare young minds from early ages at home by passing positive perceptions and attitudes. In addition to preparing the younger generation about older people, intergenerational programs can also help alert them, possibly lowering elder abuse in later years. Recent statistics have shown a 19.7 % increase in reports about elder abuse from 2000 to 2003 (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2006). In 2000 number of elder abuse reports from 54 states was 472,813 (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2005). These figures may not represent total numbers. It is estimated that "... over five times as many as new incidents of abuse and neglect were unreported" (Administration on Aging, 1998, p. 15). Education and practical experiences from early years can help teach positive

views about older people and dispel any misconceptions or negative attitudes toward them.

Research and intervention

Scholars in the field of family sciences will need to draw attention to this area with more research and provide more significant insights into the issue. This will guide the policymakers to realize the need for further investigation. Evaluative studies of intervention and intergenerational programs help in this regard. Emphasizing research on changing the roles of older adults in the family is recommended, and such research needs to be supported through government agencies. Improved technology and communication of scientific awareness among the aging population are necessary. Among the 5.8 million co-resident grandparents, it was found that 64% were women, among which the highest percentage was those aged 50-59. From children's perspective, since most (39%) of them lived with their grandparents for five or more years (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003), teaching positive perceptions in children under 18 years is necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of the current study propel upcoming inventive research to fill in the gaps and augment the knowledge in the area. The researcher predicts the inevitability of the situation when the older population becomes a considerable part of society in the coming years. Some of the recommendations are briefly listed here for consideration in the future.

1. Replication of the study using a larger sample size and a much more diverse population can provide helpful information about children's perceptions and attitudes toward older generations across ethnicities.
2. It is also recommended that enough females and males be examined to understand any gender differences in perceptions of older people.
3. Examining perceptions and attitudes across different age groups would also be interesting. Since developmental patterns change during the lifespan, it can be noteworthy to review changes in perceptions at different ages using longitudinal and longitudinal-cross-sectional designs. By knowing during which age range children frame and stabilize their perceptions and attitudes, educators can plan and execute instructional programs to help encourage positive views and remove misconceptions toward older persons and the aging process.
4. Among other methodological elements, the use of videotaping during the interview sessions is recommended. This will capture children's gestures and body language, which was impossible using audio taping.
5. Including reports from other family members such as parents or other adults such as teachers, daycare providers, or neighbors about their attitudes toward older persons and aging can provide important information about how, when, and where children acquire their thoughts and frame their opinions about older generations.
6. Children may be asked to draw any other adult or themselves to see how the drawings differed from those drawn about older persons. Such comparisons can help confirm children's opinions toward different age groups, which might prompt possible intervention programs.

7. Gender and kinship maternal or paternal side of grandparents can be specified and studied for any differences in children's perceptions regarding lineage or gender of the grandparent.
8. The researcher considers that multiple sessions using multiple drawings at different times of day can be studied for any variations in children's perceptions. Such rich and thick data might provide an in-depth analysis of attitudes and views that children might possess toward older adults.
9. Different media, such as watercolors, oil paints, clay, or collage, may be used to observe children's creative ways of expressing views toward older adults.
10. Rigorous methods can be employed to assess children's intellectual levels, emotional status, and artistic abilities. Such data can provide more significant insights into understanding children's drawings and narratives about drawings. Details missed during one style or one analysis can be captured using another technique or approach.
11. Current intergenerational programs can be evaluated for their effectiveness, and necessary improvements can be suggested based on changes in perceptions checked before and after participating in such programs.

Similar studies in the area can help highlight the significance of the subject and the outcomes of such views in the coming years. The current study was an attempt in this direction. Follow-up research in this area can provide valuable information to educators, counselors, researchers, and policymakers to understand and emphasize the need to instill positive perceptions and attitudes among younger generations.

SUMMARY

The current study was an attempt to examine the perceptions and attitudes of school-age children aged 7 to 11 years who were raised by their grandparents. In the previous chapters, the rationale for the study, purposes of the study, review of literature from the past, methodology used in the current study, analysis of the data, discussions, interpretation of results, and recommendations for the future have been addressed. The coming years see a potential increase number of older adults in the societal structure, which calls for early preparation of younger generations to understand, handle and manage the situation. Educators, researchers, policymakers, and government officials must look at the impending state of affairs related to elderly adults and perceptions of aging among the rest of the community, especially young children. The researcher believes that future inquiries in this area will highlight the formation of children's perceptions and aspects influencing them. Further studies can underscore possible methods of introducing positive values and views among children from early years through various techniques; the current study was an attempt in this regard.

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