

Mini Review

Intergenerational Programs and Projects as a Proposal for Psychosocial Action in the Promotion of Active Aging

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Abstract

Introduction: Active aging promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) promote not only to add years to life, but also life to years. The pillars of active aging are based on health, safety, participation and education for life. To offer the possibility for older people to actively participate in society, there are different strategies, among which intergenerational programs and projects stand out.

Objective: This mini-review aimed to review the value of intergenerational programs and projects in promoting active aging, through one of its fundamental pillars: the integration and participation of older adults.

Method: The methodological procedure used in this paper involved a narrative approach with analysis from different sources. Different databases were consulted (WoS, PubMed, SciELO), and organizations such as the WHO and various official resources were used as sources of information.

Results: Intergenerational programs and projects are plans coordinated and designed by educational centers, senior centers and other organizations and associations - public and private - that want to work together for the mutual benefit of older adults, children and youth. After review the benefits of intergenerational programs and projects, it stands out one of the recent and successful initiative implemented in Spain -the intergenerational program "Adopt a Grandparent". This initiative is dedicated to fostering connections between different generations with the aim of alleviating situations of loneliness among older people.

Discussion and Conclusions: Participation between generations brings us closer to a more intergenerational society. The social network formed through bidirectional synergies can positively impact aging, serving as a compass for the health and psychological well-being of older people. In essence, advocating for the promotion of intergenerational programs and projects, as leading of the sphere social policies enables the construction of a society for all ages with psychosocial benefits.

INTRODUCTION

World Health Statistics estimate that elderly population – people over 65 years of age – is increasing at the global level [1]. In 2021, around 761 million people worldwide were 65 years of age or older and this figure is expected to continue rising to reach 1.6 billion in 2050. Along these lines, data from the European Commission [2] indicates that in 2019, more than a fifth of the European population (EU-27) was aged 65 or over. And future projections indicate that between 2019 and 2100 the percentage of people aged 80 or over in the EU-27 will multiply by 2.5, going from 5.8% to 14.6% of the population. Specifically, in Spain, data from the National Statistics Institute [3] estimate that the current elderly population in Spain amounts to 9.5 million people, following the global and European trend, with an increasing number for the next few decades.

The aging of the population represents a shared challenge, which requires being addressed from a comprehensive and

collaborative approach, focused on an approach that promotes health and well-being, to try to offer more sustainable responses to the traditional models of addressing aging, associated to deficit and disease. In response to this, it emerged, active aging promoted by the World Health Organization [4-6] that would allow not only to add years to life, but also life to years, as reflected in the parameter of disability-free life expectancy. The determinants involved active aging give a good account of this – economic and social determinants, physical environment, socio-health services, personal and behavioral determinants. Under this prism, intergenerational proposals appear, materialized in programs and projects mainly as strategies that promote active aging. These plans are coordinated and devised by educational centers, senior centers, and other organizations and associations, both public and private. The collaborative efforts are aimed at working added up for the mutual benefit of older adults, children, and youth.

This mini-review was conducted to promote the significance

of intergenerational programs and projects in fostering active aging, specifically by emphasizing one of its core elements: the integration and participation of older adults.

METHOD

The methodological procedure employed in this paper utilized a narrative approach with analysis from different sources. Various databases, including WoS, PubMed, and Scielo, were consulted. Information was gathered from organizations such as the WHO and the International Plan on Aging of the European Union, with data sourced from the European Commission – Eurostat and the National Statistics Institute.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The active aging includes the integration and participation of older people in society, as well as protection and security, professional health care, as well as lifelong learning, with the aim of improving the quality of life to as people age [4]. The pillars of active aging are based on health, safety, participation and education for life and it is understood as that process that allows people to enhance their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being, throughout the aging cycle. Taking into account the integration and participation pillar of active aging to offer the possibility for older people to actively participate in society, active contributing, there are different strategies, among which intergenerational programs and projects stand out [5].

The European Commission's Green Paper on Aging [7] aims to launch a broad policy debate on aging in order to discuss options on how to anticipate and respond to the challenges it poses and the opportunities it provides, especially taking into account the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Decade of Healthy Aging of Nations United. The powers to deal with the effects of aging correspond mainly to the States members, but the European Union (EU) is well placed to highlight key issues and trends, as well as to provide support to the measures adopted in the field of aging at national, regional and local levels. This can help Member States and regions to develop their own specific policy responses to ageing. Among the intergenerational initiatives carried out by the EU, three stand out: #StrongerTogether, the European Body of Solidarity and Horizon 2020.

The intergenerational programs and projects are aimed at creating spaces of meeting and carrying out planned activities, with specific objectives and continuity over time. Intergenerational contact is considered effective in preventing discriminatory attitudes between generations and improve mutual understanding and solidarity, while promoting good aging [6]. Older people generally believe that participating in an intergenerational program helps them improve health and well-being [8], improves functional capacity, reduces depressive symptoms, reduces isolation, provides more positive and optimistic attitudes towards life, and it is a platform for mutual assistance between generations. Nevertheless for this is needed at least three elements key: That different generations participate (at least two); that the planning of activities is planned carefully

and are focused on the exchange and with the idea of benefiting all who participate; and have continuity over time [9].

Nowadays, two million older people in Spain live alone and do not receive visitors. Loneliness and isolation lead to a higher risk of dementia, risk of heart disease and stroke, risk of depression, anxiety and suicide, in short, premature death [10]. Under this framework, one of the most recent important intergenerational initiatives carried out in Spain is *Adopt a grandparent -Adopta Un Abuelo-* [11], which is dedicated to connecting generations with in order to alleviate situations of loneliness among older people. The social entity (adoptaunabuelo.org) was established in 2014 and has since evolved into a social movement, earning recognition over 20 times for entrepreneurship and social innovation on both national and international stages. To date, 2023, it has offered over 50,000 hours of companionship to more than 6,600 adopted grandparents, facilitated by a community of over 13,000 volunteers. The organization has also organized more than 290 socialization events for older people. Presently, it boasts a user base exceeding 250,000 registered individuals across 18 countries, and it has had in more than 50 municipalities in Spain, being a hybrid model between sustainability and social impact. This program has the purpose of creating transformative experiences, connecting generations and two objectives: on the one hand, that our elders feel listened to, accompanied and loved; but, on the other hand, that the volunteers learn values and experiences during visits. The activities carried out consist of telephone support, video calls, foodie events or influential grandparents who work on the social inclusion of older people who suffer from unwanted loneliness. Additionally, This initiative promotes Sustainable development goals (SDG): SDG.3 Health and Wellbeing and SDG.10 of reducing inequalities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The global demographic trend towards population aging has promoted active and healthy aging as a possibility of adding quality of life to the years. Nevertheless, demographic aging, as a global and local challenge, is also associated with a series of invisible challenges, among them, loneliness, a silent problem. It is estimated that in Spain 1 in 5 older people report high levels of loneliness, 1 in 4 feel socially isolated and/or suffer from depression [12].

As a proposal to reduce loneliness and isolation of older people, intergenerational programs and projects allows the involvement of different generations in this type of projects contributes to the development of a more intergenerational society. The social networks created through bidirectional synergies can positively impact active aging, serving as a guiding force for the health and well-being of older people, and the broader society. How it has been displayed *Adopt a grandparent -Adopta Un Abuelo-* is an intergenerational program company for the elderly which currently has a high participatory representation. The program accompanies older people who live both in residences and at home and the principal benefits are associated that it allows older people to reduce symptoms of loneliness and isolation,

feeling more listened to, supported and loved. Furthermore, both the young volunteers and the older beneficiaries participating confirm that it is an enriching and satisfying experience [11].

In summary, the promotion of intergenerational programs and projects, positioned within the real of social policies, serves as a means to construct a society that caters to all age groups. It acts as a targeted psychosocial initiative in promoting active aging. Future intergenerational perspectives could take this proposal as a reference model review: *Adopt a grandparent -Adopta Un Abuelo-* to design new projects that connect generations and facilitate good aging with positive impact on active aging.

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