



## Attitudes of elderly persons and professionals towards intergenerational exchanges

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### Abstract

*Objective:* to describe and compare the responses of elderly persons and professionals involved in permanent education programs in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, using the Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale (IEAS), considering the variables living with children, for the elderly persons, and work with intergenerational groups or only with the elderly, for the professionals. *Method:* The convenience sample consisted of 148 elderly persons and 52 professionals. The participants responded to the IEAS and a questionnaire to delineate their profile in terms of age, gender and educational level. Comparative analysis, using the Mann-Whitney test, weighted each factor of the IEAS and the averages by items and by factors. *Results:* Compared to the professionals, the elderly had more negative perceptions of the attitudes of children towards the elderly ( $p < 0.001$ ) and more positive perceptions of the attitudes of the elderly towards children ( $p < 0.001$ ). Elderly persons who did not live with children had more negative perceptions of the interaction between children and the elderly than those who lived with children ( $p = 0.003$ ). Professionals working with intergenerational groups had more positive perceptions of the interaction between children and the elderly than professionals who worked only with older age groups ( $p = 0.015$ ). *Conclusion:* Intergenerational activities can be an important mediator of attitudes regarding the interaction between children and the elderly, as well as a form of training and professional renewal for those who work or intend to work in intergenerational activities.

**Keywords:** Attitude.  
Intergenerational Relations.  
Children. Elderly.

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## INTRODUCTION

Attitudes are learned or altered through different contexts (social, educational, cultural) and can have a major impact on social interactions<sup>1-4</sup>. Knowledge and interactions between different generations are essential to promote positive attitudes<sup>5,6</sup>.

Intergenerationality strengthens communication, relationships and the permanent exchange of ideas between individuals of different age groups, encouraging the formation and consolidation of social bonds that allow the subjects of such relationships to enrich their knowledge and acquire life experiences<sup>7</sup>.

The development of actions that integrate the elderly, adults, youth, adolescents and children is necessary for the deconstruction of stereotypes and the minimization of age-related prejudices. Intergenerational programs are social vehicles that, through continuing activities, allow for exchanges of experiences, the building of meaningful ties and reciprocity among the participants, and bringing different generations together by creating moments of coexistence. When there is respect for the diversities and knowledges of individuals, as well as the mutual recognition of the needs of each generation, solidarity in the intergenerational relationship is established<sup>7-11</sup>.

In order for these programs to be viable, appropriate methods must be developed that facilitate meetings and result in joint actions so that the interests of both elderly persons and the younger generation are stimulated. Intergenerational strategies adapted to these needs aimed at different generations are fundamental to achieve intergenerational dialogue and solidarity, promoting meaningful contact between the different generations<sup>9,10</sup>.

Intergenerational programs have beneficial effects for participants. Younger generations tend to have reduced dropout rates and improved academic and social skills. Elderly persons present improvements in mental and physical health and the reduction of solitude and isolation. For both generations there is improvement of self-esteem and greater understanding of others<sup>10,12</sup>.

Several studies have described the benefits generated by participation in intergenerational activities. A study of children and the elderly who

participated in activities in small and large groups showed that the elderly enjoyed keeping up to date and felt that they had contributed positively to the growth and development of the children. Several elderly persons said they felt mentally stimulated and many expressed satisfaction with the emotional support, acceptance and friendship. The benefits for children were related to attention, socialization and improved perception of basic human needs<sup>12</sup>. After several monthly meetings in which the elderly told stories and talked to primary school students about customs and traditions, a study identified the cultural enrichment and internalization of the elderly figure as a source of experience and wisdom for children. The elderly experienced improvements in self-image and self-esteem and satisfaction with life<sup>13</sup>.

Todoaro<sup>14</sup> describes the need for planned actions, setting objectives, choosing materials and activities and evaluating the proposed strategy. In intergenerational programs, the mediators (teachers and monitors) are considered members of the middle generation, who contribute to the process of interaction between the younger and older generations and serve as models. They maintain and cultivate relationships with children, young people and the elderly, transmitting values, encouraging participation and establishing roles among those involved. It is important that the mediators are aware of the different possibilities and the different effects on the learning process and the implications of intergenerational conflict that may be present. Given the importance of the mediator, training in the activity to be practiced, regarding the profile of the participants, and on the very relationship that the generations establish is required, so that they have a more comprehensive view, neither adultizing the children nor infantilizing the elderly and providing a productive and pleasurable intergenerational encounter<sup>7,15,16</sup>.

Since information and interaction between members of different groups can foster positive attitudes and reduce negative attitudes, the promotion of technical, recreational and pedagogical training and the accompaniment of specialized human resources are necessary to serve both the elderly public and other age groups<sup>1,3,5,11,17</sup>.

Understanding the multidimensionality of attitudes stemming from intergenerational exchanges is crucial to the establishment of intergenerational

cooperation. Thus, the present article aims to describe and analyze the responses of the elderly and teaching professionals to the Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale (IEAS), considering the variables living with children, among the elderly, and working with intergenerational groups or only with the elderly, among the teaching professionals.

## METHOD

The research participants were taken from educational programs located in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. One program was a reference in teaching and research in a public higher education institution in the state capital. Another two were from institutions from municipal regions near the state capital. The three programs were chosen based on their reputations and the qualified work they have carried out and the extensive network of non-formal education offered to the elderly public.

A non-probabilistic convenience sample was employed. All the students and teaching professionals were invited to participate in the research, through verbal invitation and the making available of a text

describing the research project prepared by the researchers and their program coordinators. All those who responded positively to the invitation were included in the sample.

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study included presence at the institution on the day of data collection and interest in participating in the study. Incomplete or unfinished protocols were considered to be exclusion criteria. The present study did not consider cognitive limitations, the diagnosis of depression or sensory deficiencies. Participants self-completed the research protocol, which contained a questionnaire and a scale. The questionnaire was used to identify the profile of the participants in terms of age, gender and level of schooling. The Brazilian version of the Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale (IEAS) created by Stremmel et al.<sup>18</sup>, based on Likert type items, was used. The IEAS underwent a process of semantic and cultural validation ranging from greatest concordance (5) to greatest discordance (1)<sup>19</sup>. The validation process of the IEAS was performed previously and, in light of the convergent and construct validity, the 23 items were allocated into three factorial domains, shown in Chart 1 below.

**Chart 1.** Factorial domains and items of Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale, Campinas, São Paulo, 2014.

Perceptions of attitudes of children towards older adults	Perceptions of attitudes of older adults towards to children	Perceptions of the interaction between children and older adults
Children are too selfish to be around older adults. (3*)	Older adults are responsive to the needs of young children. (1*)	Older adults and children help each other. (11*)
Children cheat older adults at game. (9*)	Older adults share wisdom with children. (2*)	Older adults and children have warm relationships. (12*)
Older adults have difficulty earning a child's respect. (10*)	Older adults are gentle and kind to children. (4*)	Older adults enjoy activities with children. (15*)
Children feel insecure around older adults. (13*)	Older adults are too protective of children. (5*)	Children and older adults naturally feel affection toward one another. (16*)
Children think older adults are boring. (14*)	Children stimulate older adults' interest. (6*)	Children and older adults make good companions. (17*)
Older adults get sick around children. (19*)	Children ask too many questions to be around older adults. (7*)	Children and older adults have fun together (18*)
Children think older adults are ugly. (20*)	Older adults are too lenient with children when they misbehave. (8*)	
Children are too active for older adults. (21*)		
Older adults are too frail to be around young children. (22*)		
Children think older adults are dumb.. (22*)		

\* The numbers in parentheses indicate their order of appearance in the instrument;

The scale was applied differently for each group. Individual interviews were conducted with the professionals who developed the teaching activities. For the elderly persons, the research protocol was provided, and reading assistance was provided for those who presented difficulties during completion of the form. The interviewers were previously trained. Information about the objectives, the task involved, the minimum psychological and physical risks, as well as the guarantee of confidentiality and the right to abandon the project at any time was provided before the application of the instrument.

The participants signed a Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), authorized by the Research Ethics Committee FCM/UNICAMP (CCAAE: 30881414.9.0000.5404).

The Mann-Whitney test was used for data analysis. Comparative analysis was used to weight each factorial domain of the IEAS. In the elderly group the means were weighted by items and by factors according to whether the individual lived

with or did not live with children. In the group of professionals, the weighting of the means by items and by factors was based on whether the individual worked with an elderly group or worked with intergenerational groups. To analyze internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used, with alpha values greater than 0.70 indicating the high consistency and reliability of the scale. The significance level adopted for the statistical tests was 5% or  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The answers of the professionals and the elderly were considered together in data analysis. In terms of the exploratory factorial analysis of the IEAS items, the Kaiser MSA measurement was above 0.60, indicating the consistency of the total sample.

Table 1 presents the profile of professionals and the elderly in absolute frequency and in approximate percentages.

**Table 1.** Profile of participants in the process of construct and convergent validity of the Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale. Campinas, São Paulo, 2014.

Variables/Groups	Professionals (n=52). N (%)	Elderly Persons (n=148). N (%)
Gender		
Female	34 (65.4)	132 (89)
Male	16 (34.6)	16 (11)
Age (years)		
18-39	32 (61.5)	0
40-59	18 (34.7)	0
60-69	2 (3.8)	85 (57.4)
70-79	0	52 (35.1)
80+	0	11 (7.5)
Schooling (years)		
1-4	0	38 (25.7)
5-8	0	36 (24.3)
9-11	0	33 (22.3)
12+	52 (100)	41 (27.7)
Receives continuing training		
Yes	37 (71.2)	-
No	15 (28.8)	-
Intergenerational work / Lives with children		
Yes	33 (68.8)	107 (72.3)
No	15 (31.2)	41 (27.7)

According to Table 1, the sample was predominantly made up of female professionals, aged between 18 and 39 years, with a complete higher education, and who received continuing training and work or worked with intergenerational activities involving children and elderly persons.

The elderly participants were mostly female, aged between 60 and 69 years, had more than 12 years of schooling and lived with children.

Regarding attitudes towards the intergenerational exchanges between elderly persons and professionals, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups for the score of the perceptions of children's attitudes towards elderly persons factor, which was lower in the elderly persons group, and for the score of the perceptions of the attitudes of elderly persons towards children factor, which was higher in the group of elderly persons, according to Table 2.

Table 2 shows that, in comparison with the professionals, the elderly persons had more negative

perceptions about children's attitudes towards the elderly ( $p < 0.001$ ). On the other hand, they had more positive perceptions about the attitudes of the elderly towards children ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 3 shows the statistically significant differences for the comparison of the factors between the group of elderly persons that lived with children and those that did not.

There was a statistically significant difference between the elderly persons who lived with and those who did not live with children for the perceptions of the interaction between children and elderly persons factor score, which was more negative among elderly persons who did not live with children ( $p = 0.003$ ).

Table 4 shows the comparisons of the factors among professionals who worked with intergenerational groups and those who worked only with groups of elderly persons.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Intergenerational Exchange Attitude Scale factors among elderly persons and professionals. Campinas, São Paulo, 2014.

Variables/Groups	Professionals (n=52)	Elderly Persons (n=148)	<i>p</i> -valor*
Perceptions of attitudes of children towards older adults	3.75 (0.50)	3.25 (0.54)	<0.001
Perceptions of attitudes of older adults towards children	3.37 (0.44)	3.86 (0.51)	<0.001
Perceptions of the interaction between childrens and older adults	3.75 (0.52)	3.90 (0.59)	=0.063

\* *P*-value related to Mann-Whitney test for the comparison of the values between the groups of elderly persons and professionals.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Intergenerational Exchange Attitude Scale factors between elderly persons who live or do not live with children. Campinas, São Paulo, 2014.

Variables/Groups of elderly persons	Lives with children		<i>p</i> -value*
	Yes (n=107)	No (n=41)	
Perceptions of attitudes of children towards older adults	3.28 (0.57)	3.17 (0.42)	0.213
Perceptions of attitudes of older adults towards to children	3.90 (0.52)	3.73 (0.47)	0.066
Perceptions of the interaction between childrens and older adults	3.98 (0.60)	3.70 (0.52)	0.003

\* *P*-value relating to Mann-Whitney test for the comparison of the values between the two groups of elderly persons.

**Table 4.** Comparison of factors of Intergenerational Exchange Attitude Scale among professionals who worked with intergenerational groups and those who worked only with elderly persons. Campinas, São Paulo, 2014.

Variables/Groups of professionals	Intergenerational Work		<i>p</i> -value*
	Yes (n=35)	No (n=17)	
Perceptions of attitudes of children towards older adults	3.80 (0.55)	3.69 (0.36)	0.301
Perceptions of attitudes of older adults towards children	3.38 (0.45)	3.35 (0.45)	0.920
Perceptions of the interaction between children and older adults	3.86 (0.52)	3.49 (0.51)	0.015

\* *P*-value relating to Mann-Whitney test for the comparison of the values between the two groups of professionals.

There is a statistically significant difference between professionals working with intergenerational groups and those who worked only with elderly persons for the perceptions of the interaction between children and elderly persons factor. Professionals working with intergenerational groups had more positive perceptions about the interaction between children and elderly persons ( $p = 0.015$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study investigated attitudes towards intergenerational exchanges in a sample of teaching professionals and elderly persons enrolled in continuing education programs. Significant relationships between attitudes towards the intergenerational exchanges of elderly persons and professionals were identified. The elderly persons presented different attitudes in relation to intergenerational exchanges based on the variables living or not living with children. The same data were identified among professionals who worked with and those who did not work with intergenerational activities.

The results of this study, compared with the profiles of other experiments involving continuing education programs reported in literature, are similar. Most of the professionals were females, aged between 18 and 39 years and all had a higher level education. A study by Jarrott et al.<sup>16</sup>, which assessed attitudes towards intergenerational exchanges in day-care administrators for elderly persons and of infant schools that carried out activities of this type, found the age of the interviewees ranged from 19 to 52 years, with 95% between 19 and 29 years of age. All were female.

Women represented the majority of the elderly participants of the sample. The more frequent presence of women in programs of permanent education has also been described in other Brazilian studies of this nature, as well as in research outside Brazil<sup>20-22</sup>.

Brazilian literature shows that women have a more active participation in society and, therefore, visit places for a range of purposes, such as education, sports and leisure. The role of women and their greater social engagement, influenced by cultural issues, life expectancy, improvements in living conditions, and a greater concern for health, has resulted in the phenomenon known as the feminization of old age, or the growth of the female population over 60 years of age in society<sup>23</sup>.

Data regarding the educational level of the elderly persons are also similar to those documented in Brazilian literature and literature from other countries on educational programs geared to this age group<sup>20,21</sup>. Most elderly persons who attend permanent education programs have, on average, ten years of schooling.

Regarding the attitude of elderly persons, a study of this public by Lu et al.<sup>24</sup> aimed to investigate the attitude of elderly persons towards old age and to analyze the associations of such attitudes with well-being, participation and social support. The result showed that elderly persons with higher levels of schooling and who lived in urban areas had more positive attitudes towards old age. In general, a high level of education may be related to positive to neutral attitudes towards old age, evidencing a heterogeneous perception of this phase of life<sup>11,25,26</sup>.

Regarding attitudes towards intergenerational exchanges, in comparison with the professionals, elderly persons expressed more positive perceptions about the attitudes of the elderly towards children. Of the few existing studies, there is evidence of a tendency of elderly persons to have more positive attitudes towards children<sup>8</sup>.

The elderly persons displayed a more negative perception about children's attitudes toward elderly persons than the professionals, and believed that children have more negative attitudes towards the elderly<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, the study by Todaro<sup>14</sup> analyzed the attitudes of children, controlling for gender, age and intensity of coexistence with the elderly persons, as well as testing the effectiveness of a children's reading program containing elderly characters. Children between the ages of seven and ten participated in an educational intervention, featuring pre-test, treatment and post-test, consisting of five sessions with an average duration of 50 minutes each. Comparing the scores of items based on the domains of the Todaro Scale for the Assessment of the Attitudes of Children Towards Aging, the children's attitudes towards elderly persons were generally more positive, especially for the domains of social and personal relationships (relating to the social image of the elderly persons). The least positive scores of children in relation to elderly persons were for agency and cognition. Boys and older children had more negative attitudes, but also improved the most between the pre-test and the post-test. Children who did not live with their grandparents had more negative attitudes about the persona domain, and it was found that a greater number of activities performed with grandparents led to more positive attitudes among children in the cognition domain. This study highlights the importance of intergenerational relationships in changing and promoting more positive attitudes towards old age.

It is therefore emphasized that such attitudes are socially learned, either explicitly or unconsciously, and can be modified throughout life from observation, coexistence and experiences<sup>6,11,14</sup>.

In the present study, perceptions about the interaction between children and elderly persons

were more negative in elderly persons who did not live with children compared to those who lived with children. It was evidenced that the lack of contact and interaction with another generational group may reflect the presence of stereotypes and prejudices. In addition to approximation with different generations, one must also consider the quality of the relationship established for the promotion of more positive attitudes about others<sup>1,14</sup>.

A study carried out involving children and elderly persons in intergenerational reminiscing activities, where the elderly persons told autobiographical stories, shared personal memories and recollections of the past in order to transmit popular traditions and life experiences to younger generations, found through tests before and after the intervention that there were positive effects on the perceptions and attitudes of children and elderly persons regarding the other age group<sup>27</sup>.

Professionals working with intergenerational groups presented more positive perceptions about the interaction between children and elderly persons than professionals who did not carry out activities involving different generations. In the Jarrott et al.<sup>16</sup> study, the results for the IEAS 'relations and interactions' factor were good, indicating more positive attitudes about intergenerationality between children and elderly persons.

Education about aging can clarify misunderstandings involving images, social facts, and psychological and physical aspects. The effects and benefits of education programs about aging are guided by clarifying questions about this issue and, therefore, aim to minimize prejudices and negative attitudes related to age<sup>6,11,14,24,28,29</sup>.

Promoting technical, recreational and pedagogical training and the accompaniment of specialized human resources not only for the elderly, but for all ages, is important, since information and interaction between members of different groups provide positive attitudes<sup>1,3,5,14,17,30</sup>.

One limiting factor of the present study is that it represents the only application of the IEAS in a Brazilian context. It is therefore important to carry out intervention and segmental studies in order

to verify possible changes in attitudes regarding exchanges between children and elderly persons, when they interact with one another. and when this subject is being approached.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to describe and compare the behavior of elderly persons and professionals using the Intergenerational Exchanges Attitude Scale (IEAS), considering the variables coexistence with children for elderly persons, and working with intergenerational groups or only with elderly persons, for professionals.

The elderly persons presented more negative perceptions of the attitudes of children towards

the elderly than the professionals. In contrast, the elderly persons expressed a more positive perception of the attitudes of the elderly towards children. In addition, attitudes regarding the interaction between children and elderly persons were more negative among elderly persons who did not live with children than in elderly persons who lived with a younger generation. It was found that professionals working with intergenerational groups presented more positive attitudes regarding the interaction between children and elderly persons than those who did not develop intergenerational activities. In order to reduce negative attitudes towards intergenerational exchanges, the development of intergenerational activities, as well as the training and refreshing of the technical and theoretical knowledge of professionals who act and/or intend to act in actions that promote intergenerationality is required.

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Received: October 25, 2016

Reviewed: March 23, 2017

Accepted: May 22, 2017