



„NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY PERSONS”

*„Age is measured by human needs.
As more needs we have , the younger we are”*
A. Awdiejew

There are many classifications of human needs. In social studies we connect to psychological concepts. Often we understand a need as „missing something”, leading us to an uncomfortable state, which motivates us towards a change, to accommodate this need” (A. Kaminski)

Most often the authors are using the concept of need proposed by the American psychiatrist Abraham H. Maslow, who suggested five groups of needs in hierarchical layout:

- Physiological needs: sleep, food, breathing, drink, procreation etc.
- Security needs: care, order, freedom, avoiding pain, fearlessness, material stability etc.
- Acceptance, love and sense of belonging: interaction with others, love and sense of belonging
- Prestige and honour (respect): respect to yourself and others, self worth, need to achieve
- Self realisation and fulfillment: to use your talents,, maximise your potential, finding and fulfilling the meaning of life.

Majority of theories of human needs divide the needs by two groups:

1. Physiological needs (biological): oxygen, hunger, protection from climate change;
2. Psycho social needs: acquired, socially established for example: love, being part of the group, acceptance, esthetic needs.

In learning studies, we analyse mainly our psychological needs (by unit) and social needs, and missing the group of biological needs. However we pay the attention to psycho social needs. Professor Halina Shwartz, the creator of the University of The Third Age in Poland, reminds us that „for life and self esteem, it is not enough to only satisfy our basic needs but also to take care of higher needs such as knowledge, creativity and beauty.

Gerontologist Mr. Zbigniew Woźniak claims that needs of the elderly can not be analysed as lesser of the younger persons. Apart from the material aspects, that are necessary for normal functioning of the elderly person, it is also important to remember about psycho social needs. They are based on gender, level of education, profession, personality, health condition and family structure.

A group of experts under the direction of gerontologist C. Tibbitts has indicated the following needs of the elderly persons:

- Need for social activity
- Need to be recognised as part of the social structure and to interact
- Need to fulfill your time in a meaningful way
- Need for social interaction
- Need for individual recognition
- Need for self expression and achievement
- Need for social and intellectual stimulation
- Need for proper health care and access to health care facilities
- Need for well balanced lifestyle and good relationship with family
- Need for spiritual fulfillment

In reality the structure and hierarchy of the needs for older persons remain the same (Susłowska, Puchalska and others). However, in older age there is a change of importance and intensity of various needs. Not all the needs are consciously identified. We must not forget about our expectations which are the needs we want to experience but we do not express them and they remain hidden.

Fulfilling the needs can bring happiness, satisfaction and give piece of mind. To ignore our needs can be dangerous and lead to various health problems such as allientation, rejection, emotional instability, sleeplessness, purposelessness, anxiety, depression and many more.

With the exception of health care and access to health care facilities all the other groups of needs mentioned by C. Tibbitts can be implemented in the University of The Third Age which shows the power and the value of this institution.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined that being part of the group that shares similar needs, expectations, values and interests is extremely important, valuable, empowering and encouraging.

Magdalena Wnuk-Olenicz PhD,
Manager U.T.A. Wroclaw, Poland