

The process of aging of the population as a consequence of changes in demographic structure of societies is a challenge for the national politics of many countries, therefore the attention of politicians and teams of experts not only from gerontology but also from many other fields of science focuses on the studies of widely defined determinants of active, healthy or successful aging. Identifying groups at risk of unfavorable aging related to poor health, functional status and health-related quality of life sets the directions for looking for newer, safer and more effective interventions aimed at ensuring a long, healthy and satisfying life of seniors.

Among factors which in the last decades gained growing interest in the research concerning health and quality of life of older people are widely defined psychosocial factors. Among the main determinants of health condition, apart from the socio-economic status and place of residence, the influence of social capital is distinguished - and in particular its aspects such as social interactions, conducive to building a social networks and various forms of support derived from them, or the level of social trust and the degree of participation in social life; however, the negative aspects of social determinants should also be mentioned, such as manifestations of discrimination and exclusion, the feeling of social isolation and loneliness. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly changed the patterns of social life, especially in the elderly population. The first waves of the pandemic limited social contacts, especially between children and the elderly, which could also lead to the weakening of social ties. As a consequence of mobility limitations and lockdown, there was an increase in social isolation, a feeling of loneliness, a decrease in general well-being, and a greater risk of mental health disorders. Moreover, highly stressful public moods resulted from the continuous daily reporting of the number of cases and deaths by the mass-media. Difficult access to medical care may have contributed to an increase not only in unhealthy behaviors, but also in "neglect in seeking medical help" despite the occurrence of disease symptoms, which led to additional problems related to physical and mental health. Hence, it seems necessary to establish the scale and intensity of occurrence of bio-psychosocial factors related to the health and quality of life of older people. Moreover, despite many previous studies on the determinants of the aging process, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to verify the previously well-documented relationships.

Based on the presented assumptions, the aim of the study will be comparative analysis of the frequency and intensity of psychosocial factors important from the point of view of research on the aging of the population in the period before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on good quality research tools and a representative sample of the older population in Poland. In addition, the study will allow to assess to what extent the relationship between the socio-economic status, social capital (including social network, social support, feeling of loneliness, the level of engagement in social life, the level of trust), the occurrence of health damage behaviors, lack of response to the occurring disease symptoms and functional status versus health and quality of life in the post-pandemic period were enhanced or weakened in relation to the pre-pandemic period.

An aspect worth mentioning in the assessment of factors related to the aging process is also the massive development of modern technologies to improve interpersonal communication. On the one hand, these possibilities are described as a substitute for face-to-face contacts and hence are given as a reason for loosening social ties and as a reason for the exclusion of older people due to the lack of competence to use these technologies. On the other hand, in the times of the pandemic, modern technologies made it possible to maintain social relations at least partially. The question is to what extent new communication and information technologies allow for the construction of new forms of social ties, lost during the pandemic, mainly due to limitations in the possibility of participating in social life and deaths of close people, especially in the period of excessive mortality. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to build good-quality research tools to assess social networks or the level of participation in social life, taking into account the aspect of using the latest technologies, while assuming that this new tool should be simple enough to be used in large population studies. This aspect of the project is new and has not been included in most of the epidemiological studies in the field of gerontology conducted so far.

Finally, the aim of the project will be developing of the new tool to measuring quality of life in older age in the new socio-demographic conditions. Along with the appreciation of the role of the aforementioned macrostructural conditions, which may not only significantly affect the individual perception of the quality of life by the older person but also cause the necessity of changes existing or adding new indicators related to the contemporary challenges.