

TEENAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AGED

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

By 2030 there will be about 65 million older persons, two and one-half times their number in 1985. An estimated 21% of all Americans will be over the age of 65, and nearly one-seventh of these senior citizens will be over 85 (Profile of Older Americans, 1985).

Americans are remaining vigorous longer than ever before. Their life experiences and flexible time schedules make them a positive and productive resource for society. These people have great potential as resource speakers (Naisbitt, 1982).

Mead (1975) suggested that there are many things a school system can do to bring adolescents and older people in contact with each other. Retired teachers can be brought back into the classroom to teach. In this way adolescents learn to relate with older people, to accept their deafness and failing eyesight, and learn from their lives.

Caldwell (1975) suggested that programs of a multi-generational nature are needed. Programs that get persons of differing ages together are needed so that they can appreciate the vantage point of the other. A study by Kastenbaum and Durkee (1964) revealed that the way in which

young people view old age is of interest because their attitudes are likely to influence their interaction with persons who are elderly, and likely also to influence the individual's own adjustment as he joins the ranks of the aged. Tuckman and Lorge (1953) suggested that individuals who have more association with old people tend to ascribe fewer negative characteristics to old people.

Lane (1964) suggested that strong educational emphasis, both in college and in high school on the elderly, their roles, and their places in society would help change negative attitudes. In the Investor and King study (1977) the majority of adolescents showed a positive attitude toward the aged. Several factors attributed to this finding including the increased awareness of the aged, and the fact that the research was done in a rural area on the aged. These studies have revealed both positive and negative attitudes toward the aged by adolescents.

#### Purposes of the Study

The overall purposes of this study were (1) to determine adolescents' perceptions of the aged, and (2) to suggest ways in which this information could be used in family life education.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Determine the relationship between adolescent's age and his/her positive or negative perception of the aged.

2. Determine the relationship between the extent of contact with the aged and adolescent's positive and negative perception of the aged.
3. Determine the relationship between adolescent's sex and his/her positive or negative perception of the aged.

### Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were identified for the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between age of adolescent and his/her perception of the aged.
2. There is no significant relationship between the extent of adolescent's contact with the elderly and the adolescent's perception of the aged.
3. There is no significant relationship between the sex of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged.

### Assumptions and Limitations

The following assumptions have been made relative to this study:

1. It was assumed that the respondents were truthful and accurate in completing the instrument.
2. It was assumed that the result of the study would enhance curriculum planning for family life education.

The following limitations were considered for this

study:

1. The study was limited to students in a small rural Oklahoma secondary school, who were between the ages of 13 and 18 and in grades seven through twelve.
2. The study was limited to a nonprobability sample thus restricting its generalizability.

#### Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following terms have been defined:

Aged: a person 65 years of age or older.

Perception: a mental image: a person's feelings and ideas.

Adolescents: persons in their teens: 13 to 19 years of age.

#### Procedures

The following procedure was used to determine adolescent's perception of the aged. The population for this study included students from a small rural Oklahoma secondary school. The students in 1985 were 13 to 19 years old.

An instrument to determine adolescents' perceptions of the aged was adapted from two questionnaires used by previous researchers. Concepts from the works of Lane (1964) and Palmore (1977) were utilized in the development of the instrument for this study. The questionnaire consisted of

forty yes and no items. The items sought teenagers' perceptions about persons 65 years and older.

The instrument was administered by the researcher. She was employed as a Vocational Home Economics teacher in the school system.

### Summary

The present Chapter organized the research problem, stated the research purpose and objectives, hypotheses, assumptions and limitations, and definitions; and briefly reported the research procedure. Chapter II gives a review of the literature which serves as a foundation for the study. Complete procedures for the study are given in detail in Chapter III.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The following review of literature provides a background for this study. Included in the review of attitudes toward the aged are: existing intergenerational programs, instruments for assessing attitudes toward the aged, need for family education about the aged, and related research.

#### Attitudes Toward the Aged

Adolescents' attitudes toward the aged affect how they interact with the aged now and give indications of how they will interact with the aged when they become adults (Hickey, Hickey, and Kalish, 1968; Kastebaum and Durkee, 1964). It is generally agreed that people tend to categorize their life experiences in order to simplify them. Much of the stereotyping is a means of deriving assumptions made about others. The prejudices that adolescents have concerning the elderly may have a strong impact on their own self-concept when they become aged.

A great deal of the research conducted on prejudice toward the aged was done by Tuckman and Lorge (1953). The

Tuckman and Lorge study found that there is substantial acceptance of stereotypes about older people. The characteristics of old people were found to be poor health, loneliness, resistance to change, and failing mental powers.

Kastenbaun's and Durkee's (1964) study with adolescents and young adults indicated that the young had predominately negative attitudes toward the aged. Old people were seen as bound to the past and old age was viewed as an unpleasant experience. A similar study of pre-adolescents, adolescents, and college students (Hickey and Kalish, 1968) found older adults being viewed more negatively than younger adults. College students, according to Weinberger and Millhan (1975), had more negative attitudes toward the aged. These college students were enrolled in introductory psychology. On the first day of class they were given an attitude questionnaire about 25-year-old people and 70-year-old people. A few weeks later the students were asked to volunteer for an extra credit experiment. The experiment consisted of communicating with a 25-year-old and a 70-year-old person selected by the teacher. On the first day of class, the questionnaire findings indicated that the students expressed significantly more negative attitudes toward the 70-year-old than the 25-year-old. After the experiment occurred the students judged the 70-year-old in a more favorable light than the 25-year-old.

A sample taken by Cameron (1972) included young adults, middle-aged and older aged persons. The study

dealt with the self-appraisal happiness controversy and hoped to provide a beginning toward answering the question of beliefs regarding generational happiness. He found middle-aged persons were frequently considered to be the happiest, whereas young adults had more chances and greater desire for fun, while the aged had the least.

Borges and Dutton (1976) surveyed attitudes toward aging among seven groups of respondents ranging in age from six to sixty-five. The respondents evaluated the "average person's life" at each of the age intervals and the "best year" of their lives. The "best year" selected increased with the age of the respondent, and the younger respondents did not rate their future lives as good or fulfilling as the older persons rated theirs. The young did not see the potential satisfaction of middle and later years.

The goal of the Chiriboga study (1978) was to consider the distribution, across the adult life cycle, for the measures: living of the best and worst ages, evaluation of the past and future, evaluation of the present, and evaluation of the past in comparison to the future. A purposive sample was drawn from a stable, lower middle-class district in a west coast community. Respondents consisted of high school seniors (age 17), newlyweds (age 24), middle-aged parents whose youngest child was about to leave the home (age 50), and individuals facing retirement (age 60). Evaluated time was assessed using two semi-structured questions and a Life Evaluation Chart (hereafter referred



to as LEC). The questions assessed the respondent's perception of timing of the best age and of the worst age. The LEC was self-administered and asked the respondents to rate each year of the past, the present, and the anticipated future (as far as they care to project). Over three-quarters of the total sample chose either adolescents or old age as the worst age. High school seniors and newlyweds indiscriminately downgraded all the later years of life. All respondents reported the present to represent a satisfying time of life, and evaluation of the present and the immediate past did not differ by group. In general, older respondents and women were more favorable in their evaluation of later life, while younger respondents and men viewed the earlier years more favorable.

A few studies have shown an attitude of neutrality toward the aged. In a study of third graders by Hickey, Hickey, and Kalish (1968) the tendency was for the aged to be seen as either very nice to children or mean or unkind. However, the aged were described as kind or friendly three times as often as they were rendered mean or unfriendly. Similar results were found by Britton and Britton (1970). Older persons were seen as more often rigid while young adults were seen as healthier and better looking. Lane (1964) did a study to help high school teachers develop supportive and respectful attitudes toward the aged in youth. The responses of the students indicated that their attitudes were generally favorable although relatively few

perceived the aged in such a way as to imply very favorable attitudes. On the other hand, none of the subjects had attitude scores in the very unfavorable category. The implication of this apparent neutralism of youth toward the elderly is that aged persons in association with youth may be existing in a climate of tolerance rather than in one of acceptance and responsiveness.

The results of the research on attitudes of adolescents toward the aged are inconclusive. It was not clear that adolescents had an entirely negative view of the aged; however, it is strongly implied that adolescents do not have a generally positive attitude toward the aged. Research has shown the strong tendency toward stereotyping of the aged varies among age groups. It even varies in adolescents with the younger aged adolescents being even more likely to attribute stereotypical characteristics to the aged than older adolescents (Hickey, and Kalish, 1968).

Judson (1985) wrote an article about attitudes toward aging. In the article she told about a 26-year-old woman who disguised herself as an 85-year-old woman once a week for three years. This woman found widespread fear of aging among younger people. Attitudes reflecting one's fear lead to myths. A common myth about aging is all old people become senile. According to Judson what we often call "senility" is curable. Any number of stresses can bring on temporary confusion in the elderly and can be treated. Fears also lead to stereotyping. The words and phrases

used often betray one's fear of aging such as "old foggy," "old geezer," "over the hill," "out to pasture," or "do not trust anyone over 30." Judson suggested ways to come to grips with one's fear of aging. Use the expertise of older people by using them as consultants or part-time employees. Some schools are making classes and facilities available to older people in the community during school hours, exposing young people to an experienced, caring group of citizens that frequently go unnoticed. Also, a person needs to begin planning for later years early in life, so that aging becomes an "unfolding stage of life" rather than an unwelcome "event." Individual constant examining and possibly overhauling one's attitudes toward aging should ensure that those needs will be met for our grandparents and parents, and for all people as they grow older.

Most of the research on prejudice against the aged indicated a tendency for all age groups, including adolescents (Hickey and Kalish, 1968; Hickey, Hickey, and Kalish, 1968; Lorge and Tuckman 1953), to view the aged as possessing stereotypical traits, and this tendency becomes stronger with increasing age. Contrary to previous studies, Thomas and Yamamoto's (1975) study of children in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 found that school age children do not share negative attitudes toward old age generally thought to be found. The question of whether there are existing negative attitudes toward aging to be found in the

general population remains unanswered. Contact with an aged person apparently is a negating factor reducing negative attitudes toward the aged (Bekker and Taylor, 1966; Rosencraz and McNevin, 1969). Some studies on differences between men and women (Kogan and Shelton, 1962; McTavish, 1971; Perril, 1963; Thorson, 1974; Tuckman and Lorge, 1953) showed a slight tendency for women to be more prejudiced against the aged than men; however, much of the research in this area was also inconclusive.

The Invester and King (1977) study of 9th and 12th grade students showed a positive attitude toward the aged. Several factors may have influenced the apparent change in orientation toward old people. The previous studies were done in the 1950's and 1960's and attitudes in the general society may have become more accepting of the aged. Festinger (1964) suggested that attitudes usually become more congruent with reality when people are exposed to groups of persons about whom they have negative attitudes. In this case, it would seem that as adolescents have been made more aware of what old people are like, their attitudes toward the aged have shifted in a positive direction.

Another factor that may have affected these adolescents' views of the aged was the background of the subjects of the study. The study was done in a rural community whereas the previous research was done in large cities and suburban areas. In rural areas, the extended family tends to remain more intact than in highly mobile

urban centers. Thus, these adolescents may have had more frequent association with the aged than they would have if they had grown up in a city far away from their grandparents.

Guillory (1983) examined the relationship between adolescents' attitudes toward older persons and adolescents' contact with older persons, particularly the grandparent known best. Analysis of the data collected from questionnaires completed by approximately 300 high school students indicated these adolescents had positive attitudes toward older persons. The style of grandparenting and ethnic background did not show a difference in these adolescents' attitudes toward older persons. The type and quality of the contact with older persons, other than grandparents, made a difference in attitudes toward older persons. This study found attitudes toward older persons and attitudes toward the grandparent known best were not the same. Although they were found to be related, they represent two different attitudes.

#### Existing Intergenerational Programs

A number of programs exist at the national, state and local levels which bring the young and old of society together. The best known federal program of this kind was the Foster Grandparent Program (Egerton, 1972). This program was originally administered by the Administration on Aging, later transferred to the Department of Health,

Education, and Welfare where funding and administration occurred through the Administration on Aging. This program was finally transferred to ACTION on July 1, 1971. The program included 10,500 foster grandparents serving 21,000 children in 137 projects in all 50 states. Stipulations for the program were that foster grandparents must be 60 years of age or older and of low income, and they must serve needy children in health, education, welfare, and related settings (Egerton, 1972).

Exemplary as this may have been it touched only the needy aged and the needy children who are isolated from each other. The isolation of the generations occurs throughout all levels of society. According to Downey (1974), in 1971, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare funded eleven pilot projects including persons 60 years of age and older in a wide range of volunteer activities. Since then, the program has been dramatically expanded. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP as it has been designated) now operates in every state under the Domestic Volunteer Services Act of 1973 (Downey, 1974). One of the most important aspects of RSVP is the work participants do in schools and colleges. According to ACTION's national information specialist, these volunteers serve in a wide variety of educational settings including public elementary and secondary schools, correctional schools, day care centers, adult education programs and colleges and universities (Downey, 1974).

Lynn (1980) conducted a study that involved the development, implementation, and evaluation of a high school curriculum in a course on life history. The experimental group interviewed an older person for at least three hours, plus attended a class seminar to discuss pertinent issues related to aging and the field experience. The study was an attempt to foster adolescent's understanding of older people in a manner which would stimulate the younger people's psychological development. A total of 51 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders at a public high school in a large midwestern city during the fall of 1979 were the subjects for the study. A nonequivalent control group design was utilized. The curriculum did have a positive affect on the experimental students' methodological development. Analysis of Covariance procedures revealed that attitudes toward older people were significantly more positive, pre to post, for the experimental group while those of the comparison group showed no change.

The project "CONGEN" (Connecting Generations) involved students from three secondary schools and senior citizens studied by Kirkeby (1982). Aging and the problems of aging was the focus of the two week study. The experimental model for each included (1) a control group, (2) a learning by interview group, (3) a learning by classroom only group, and (4) a learning by classroom and interview group. Statistically significant changes in attitude toward the aged were found in the experimental groups. Ninety-four

percent of all students were more positive than negative toward the aged. Over 50% of the experimental group students became more positive toward older persons as a result of the experience. The greatest change came in the interview only group, with the least change coming through the classroom only method of learning.

Another school project in Edmonds, Washington, drew upon a group called SOURCE (Seniors Offering Useful Resources for Children's Education) as resources in the school district. Members of the group signed up to use their skills, interests, and hobbies in working with children (Strachan, 1973). Teachers filled out requests and the center director matched requests with the volunteers. It was reported that teachers found that the elderly classroom aides brought to the classroom a great amount of warmth, patience, and affection and furnished the reassuring grandparent image "that so many children were otherwise missing" (Strachan, 1973, p. 175).

Doerman (1982) focused upon attitudes of disadvantaged adolescents toward older adults. Three purposes were identified: (1) To determine extent of disadvantaged adolescents' negative attitudes and behavioral intentions toward and knowledge about older adults; (2) To determine the extent disadvantaged adolescents' attitudes toward and knowledge about older adults can be changed as a result of a gerontology job training program; and (3) To determine the importance of relationships between knowledge, beha-



vioral intentions, and selected personal and demographic variables and attitudes toward older adults. Student participants were found to have positive attitudes and low levels of knowledge about older adults. High school seniors in gerontology significantly improved their attitudes while juniors in Gerontology significantly improved their knowledge about older adults from pre-test time to post-test time. Behavioral intentions of both groups in Gerontology were very positive at post-test time. Socioeconomic level, frequency of contact and amount of contact with older adults showed significant relationship to attitudes toward older adults at pre-test time. Grandparent(s) in home, amount of time in contact with, number of associations with older adults, and behavioral intentions showed significant relationships to positive attitudes toward the older adults at post-test time.

#### Instruments for Assessing Attitudes

##### Toward the Aged

There were a limited number of instruments available for the assessment of attitudes toward the aged. The most widely used attitudinal instrument was developed by Tuckman and Lorge (1953). This instrument was a "yes" or "no" questionnaire which consisted of 137 items in thirteen categories: conversation, activities and interests, financial, physical, family, personality traits, attitude toward the future, best time of life, insecurity, mental

deterioration, sex, interference, and cleanliness. Lane (1964) used a revised version of the Tuckman-Lorge questionnaire in examining the attitudes of youth toward old age.

A sentence completion procedure for assessing attitudes toward old people was used by Golde and Kogan (1959). The responses were intended to reflect, among other factors, the emotions, and physical attributes to "old people" and "people in general."

#### Family Life Education

Glass and Knott (1984) conducted a lesson series on death and dying in changing adolescents' death anxiety and attitudes toward older adults. The study consisted of senior high students in eight public schools of North Carolina. One social studies, psychology, or family living class in each school became the experimental group and another class in each school meeting at the same time became the control group. The study employed the pre-test-treatment post-test research design. The experimental classes participated in a two-week study of death and dying. The control group received no training, but responded to the pre-test and post-test. The Kogan OP Scale was used to measure attitudes toward older persons. The scale was used as a pre-test and post-test. The pre-test attitude score can be characterized as possessing a moderately positive attitude toward the aged. This can be

an indication of changing attitudes toward older adults within society. Students in the 12th grade had the most positive scores. Participation in the lesson series on death and dying did not seem to have a significant effect on the respondents' attitudes toward older persons.

The review of literature showed that future research should attempt to do more than analyze the effect of mere contact with the aged. A measure of the quality, in addition to the quantity of contact would add to the present knowledge of what affects formation of attitudes toward the aged (Investor and King 1977).

#### Summary

Within this Chapter related literature was discussed with regards to adolescents' attitudes toward the aged. Literature was searched to determine the availability of existing intergenerational programs that bring adolescents and the aged together. Instruments for assessing attitudes toward the aged were reviewed through the literature. Family life education was explored to show how education about older people can change adolescents' attitudes.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

The objectives of this study were to determine the adolescents' perceptions of the aged and to suggest ways in which this information could be used in family life education. The purpose of this Chapter is to describe the type of research, the population and sample plan, the instrumentation procedure, the collection of the data, and the statistical analysis of the data.

#### Type of Research

This study utilized the descriptive type of research design. Compton and Hall (1972) identified descriptive design as a means of describing current practices or beliefs with the intent of making intelligent plans for improving conditions or processes in a particular situation. Descriptive research has probably been most commonly used to obtain the opinions and attitudes of individuals. This study gathered information concerning how adolescents perceive the aged.

The approach and techniques of descriptive type of research can be used on any set of objectives that can be

well defined, such as people, vital facts about people, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behavior of people (Compton and Hall, 1972). The descriptive research was the choice for the current study as the perceptions of adolescents were being sought.

#### Instrumentation

The literature search did not disclose an instrument which specifically sought the information desired in this study. Several questionnaires (Lane, 1964; and Palmore, 1977) were used as guides for developing items and establishing the format.

The researcher developed the questionnaire by creating items which sought to describe the perceptions of teens with regard to the aged. A second section sought information of the contact teens had with the aged such as grandparents, neighbors, and other significant older people. Section three of the questionnaire allowed respondents the opportunity to comment on what he/she felt was best about being 65 years of age and older and what they thought was worse about being 65 years of age or older.

The completed instrument was reviewed by a panel of experts and then pre-tested by 45 adolescents between the ages of 13 through 18. The teachers administering the pre-test asked for student's reaction as to clarity and understanding of the items.

As a result of these two testing procedures, eight

items were reworded so as to reduce the number of interpretations open to respondents. Changes were made so that items were more easily understood by the respondents.

The revised instrument consisted of three parts. Part one contained 40 "yes" or "no" questions which sought to determine how the respondent perceived people 65 years of age and older. The second part of the questionnaire dealt with personal information about the respondent such as age, sex, and number of living grandparents. The third section of the questionnaire sought to identify the frequency of contact that the respondent had with older people.

In order to use data obtained from the questionnaire, scores were generated. Scores on adolescents' perceptions of the aged were calculated on the basis of positive answers in responses to the 40 items on the questionnaire. Items in the questionnaire were weighted in terms of their perceived positiveness or negativeness toward the aged. Items 1, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 40 were weighted positive with a "yes" response. A "no" response to items 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 38, and 39 were positive. The higher the score the more positive the respondent's perceived the aged. (See Table III, Appendix B).

Extent of contact was measured by ranking how often the adolescent had contact with his/her grandparents or other older people. The numbers assigned to the contact

were as follows: 5, daily; 4, weekly; 3, monthly; 2, twice yearly; and 1, yearly. The number values for each respondent for the two items were summed to get the point value for each participating student to determine extent of contact. The summing resulting from using the above stated code indicated that the higher the score, the more contact the adolescent had with their grandparents and other older people. No effort was made to determine the quality of the contacts.

#### Collection of Data

The population and sample for this study were 132 adolescent students in a small rural Oklahoma secondary school. The questionnaire was administered to the group on December 5, 1985. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the entire group in the school cafeteria after permission was granted by the school administration. Several teachers in the school system assisted in the administration of the questionnaire.

#### Statistical Analysis

The data were collected from the convenient sample and the responses were tabulated for the purpose of statistical analysis. The analysis of the data was structured according to the hypotheses.

The following hypotheses were tested:

Hypotheses -- (1) There is no significant relationship

between the age of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged. (2) There is no significant relationship between extent of adolescent's contact with the elderly and the adolescent's perception of the aged. (3) There is no significant relationship between the sex of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged.

Instrumentation -- Perception was measured by questions. The selected variables (sex, age, and frequency of contact with older persons) and the demographic information questions pertaining to the adolescent.

Analysis -- Pearson's correlation ( $r$ ) was used to test relationships. The .05 significant level was accepted as the confidence level. Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation was used to present data in the form of ranks.

#### Summary

The present Chapter presented the methodology involved in testing the hypotheses. It also contained the explanations of the research design, the population and the sample plan, the instrumentation procedure, the collection of data, and the statistical analysis of data.



## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

In purpose, this study was designed to determine how adolescents perceived the aged. In order to accomplish this purpose, the following objectives were formulated:

1. Determine the relationship between adolescent's age and his/her positive or negative perception of the aged.
2. Determine adolescent's positive or negative perception of the aged by the extent of adolescent's contact with the aged.
3. Determine the relationship between adolescent's sex and his/her positive or negative perception of the aged.

This chapter presents a description of the participating sample and the analysis of the data in accordance with the hypotheses.

#### Description of Sample

In this study, the population consisted of 132 students from a rural secondary school in Oklahoma. The respondents ranged in age from 13 to 18 years old; both

male and female were included. Table I presents a composite breakdown of respondents by age, sex, number of living grandparents, contacts with grandparents and contact with other older persons. Slightly more than one-fourth (26%) had three living grandparents and slightly less than one-fourth (24%) had four.

TABLE I  
DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECTS

Age	Total by Age	%
13	17	12
14	13	10
15	37	28
16	30	22
17	24	18
18	11	8
Sex	Total by Sex	
Male	66	
Female	66	
Number of Living Grandparents	Number of Students Reporting Grandparents	%
One	21	17
Two	22	18
Three	32	26
Four	29	24
More than Four	17	14
Total	121	

TABLE I (continued)

Frequency of Contact with Grandparents	Total Number of Contacts	%
Daily	27	21
Weekly	36	29
Monthly	35	28
Twice Yearly	7	6
Yearly	19	15

Table II presents a distribution of respondents by sex and age. Slightly more than half of them were 15 or 16 years of age. It is entirely by coincidence that there were equal numbers of males and females.

TABLE II  
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY SEX AND AGE

Age	Female	Male	Total by Age
13	9	8	17
14	3	10	13
15	21	16	37
16	14	16	30
17	15	9	24
18	4	7	11
Total	66	66	132

TABLE II (continued)

$\bar{x}$ age F =	15.53		
$\bar{x}$ age M =		15.43	
$\bar{x}$ age Total =			15.48

### Analysis of Data

Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation presents data in the form of ranks. This method was used because numbers were assigned to the type of contact adolescents had with the aged for statistical purposes.

Pearson's correlation ( $r$ ) was used to test relationships. This method was used to analyze the respondents perception according to their age and sex.

$H_1$ : There is no significant relationship between the age of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged.

Pearson's correlation identified no relationship between the age of the respondent and his/her perception of the aged ( $r = .031$ ). Based on these results the researcher failed to reject the hypothesis. (See Table III)

A little less than half (44%) of the females had perception scores above the mean (22.6). More than half (54%) of the males had perception scores above the mean (23.03).

TABLE III  
 ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
 OF THE AGED

	Female	Male
Total N	66	66
Mean	22.61	22.03
Range	11-38	8-37
Variance	39.63	46.34
Standard Deviation	6.30	6.81
Standard Error	.78	.84

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the extent of adolescent's contact with the elderly and the adolescent's perception of the aged.

The Spearman rank order correlation found no relationship between the extent of adolescent's association with the elderly and his/her perception of the aged (Spearman rho .052). Based on these results the researcher failed to reject the hypothesis. (See Table III and IV)

TABLE IV  
 ADOLESCENTS' FREQUENCY OF  
 CONTACT WITH AGED BY SEX

Frequency	Grandparents		Other Older Adults	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Daily	14 <sup>a</sup>	10	13	14
Weekly	32	24	20	16
Monthly	11	12	22	13
Twice Yearly	1	4	2	5
Yearly	3	7	9	10

<sup>a</sup> Indicates number of students having contact for each frequency.

Males had more contact with the elderly than females, 41% of the males scored from 8 to 10 on extent of contact whereas only 41% of the females scored from 7 to 8 points on extent of contact with the elderly.

TABLE V  
EXTENT OF CONTACT

	Female	Male
Total N	66	66
Range	2-10	0-10
Mean	6.99	5.89
Variance	3.18	6.65

Males had a 5.89 mean score on extent of contact or 45% had a contact score above the mean. Females had a 6.95 mean score on extent of contact or 59% had a contact score above the mean.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between the sex of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged.

Pearson's correlation identified no relationship between the sex of the adolescent and his/her perception of the aged as assessed by the questionnaire ( $r = .045$ ). Based on these results the researcher failed to reject the hypothesis. (See Table VI, Appendix B)

TABLE VI  
 CORRELATION OF ADOLESCENTS SEX  
 WITH THEIR PERCEPTIONS  
 OF THE AGED

	Sex <sup>a</sup>	Perceptions of the Aged
Mean	1.50	22.74
Variance	.25	41.90
Standard Deviation	.50	6.47

<sup>a</sup>Males and females; N=132  
 r=.04; df 130.

TABLE VII  
 NUMBER OF LIVING GRANDPARENTS  
 REPORTED BY SEX

Grandparents	Female	Male
0	3	7
1	9	12
2	17	5
3	14	18
4	17	12
5	4	4
6	0	3
7	0	1
8	0	1
9	2	1
10	0	1



Less than eight percent (7.5%) of the students had no grandparents. The remaining 92.5% had from 1 to 10 grandparents. This number is an indication of the many aged persons with whom secondary students may have varied contacts. The increasing number of aged people in society has implications for home economics.

#### Students Input Items

Two items on the questionnaire were not statistically analyzed. These items questioned what the students thought would be the best and worst thing about being 65 years of age and older. (See Tables VIII and IX)

Females ages 13 through 15 most often said the best things would be being retired, not having to go to school, and receiving a Social Security check. The worst things would include being lonely, being forgetful, and having trouble moving around.

The 16 through 18 year old females said the best things would be the satisfaction of knowing a person had lived a good life, no work, and having time to enjoy life. The worst was not being able to do the things you once did, being lonely, and having health problems.

The males 13 through 15 years old said the best things would be retirement, receiving Social Security check, and being able to do what you wanted. The worst things were facing death, not getting around easily, and not having sex.

The 16 through 18 year old males said the best things would be retirement, the benefits of being retired, and receiving a Social Security check. The worst things were said to be facing death, no sex, and not being able to physically do what you want.

The most frequently quoted best and worst thing about growing old clearly indicate a narrow concept of aging and its accompanying physical, mental and economic conditions. These reports provide additional implications for curriculum planners concerned with helping students understand aging more clearly.

TABLE VIII  
ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE WORST THING ABOUT AGING

Worst	Female	Male
	13-15 Years of Age	13-15 Years of Age
Loneliness	12	2
Inability to get around	6	5
Forgetfulness	5	3
Unable to care for self	4	0
Death	4	6
No sex	1	4
Health problems	2	4

TABLE VIII (continued)

	16-18 Years of Age	16-18 Years of Age
Death	3	8
Loneliness	7	2
Health problems	7	4
No sex	2	4
Unable to do what you have done	10	4
Nursing homes	6	2
Being old	2	1

Nineteen percent of the respondents (19 females, 4 males) felt being lonely was the worst thing about being 65 or older.

Eighteen percent of the respondents (7 females, 14 males) felt facing death was the worst thing about being 65 or older.

Fourteen percent of the respondents (9 females, 8 males) felt having health problems was the worst thing about being 65 or older.

TABLE IX  
 ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
 BEST THING ABOUT AGING

Best	13-15 Years of Age	
	Female	Male
Retirement	14	9
No work, no school	8	1
Social Security check	6	8
Children-Grandchildren visits	5	3
Accomplishments: security	2	3
Freedom	0	4
Being taken care of	3	2
Discounts	0	1
Wisdom	1	0
	16-18 Years of Age	
Lived the good life	9	2
No work	8	0
Social Security check	5	4
Children-Grandchildren visits	6	2
Retirement	6	2
Benefits	0	5
Wisdom	0	2
Travel	2	2

Thirty percent of the respondents (20 females, 20 males) felt that retirement was the best thing being 65 or older.

Seventeen percent of the respondents (11 females, 12 males) felt that receiving a Social Security check was the best thing about being 65 or older.

#### Summary

This Chapter presented the results of the study. It contained the description of the participating sample, an analysis of the data in accordance with the stated hypotheses, and the results from the response portion of the questionnaire which were not specified in the hypotheses.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The population of people over 65 years of age is increasing. People living longer and zero population growth are contributing to this factor. Therefore, adolescents need to be taught about the aging process and how to understand older people. This study was designed to determine adolescents' perceptions of the aged. Information gathered by this study could be helpful to family life educators. This information could help inform educators concerning how to increase adolescent's knowledge of the aged and help create a more positive attitude toward the aged.

#### Purpose and Objectives

The overall purposes of this study were (1) to determine adolescents' perceptions of the aged, and (2) to suggest ways in which this information could be used in family life education.

The specific objectives were to:

- (1) Determine the relationship between adolescent's age and his/her positive or negative perception

of the aged.

- (2) Determine the relationship between the extent of contact with the aged and adolescent's positive or negative perception of the aged.
- (3) Determine the relationship between adolescent's sex and his/her positive or negative perception of the aged.

#### Limitations

The following limitations were considered in this study:

- (1) The study was limited to students in a small rural Oklahoma secondary school, who were between the ages of 13 and 18 years of age, in grades seven through twelve.
- (2) The study was limited to a nonprobability sample thus restricting its generalizability.

#### Population and Sampling

The population for this study included adolescents 13 to 18 years of age attending a small rural Oklahoma secondary school during the 1985-86 term. A total of 132 students made up the nonprobability sample.

#### Instrument Design

The instrument used to collect data for the study was developed by the researcher using guides from Lane (1964)

and Palmore (1977) to develop items. The instrument was designed to assess adolescents' perceptions of older persons. The variables included age and sex of the adolescent, and the contact the adolescent had with the elderly. The questionnaire was pretested by 45 students ages 13 through 18. As a result of the pretesting, eight items were reworded to reduce the number of interpretations open to adolescents.

### Statistical Analysis

Pearson's correlation ( $r$ ) and Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation were used to determine relationships as outlined in the hypotheses.

### Results and Conclusions

The following results were substantiated by statistical analysis. The analysis indicated that:

- (1) The age of the adolescent did not significantly relate to the adolescent's perception of the aged.
- (2) The extent of the adolescent's contact with the elderly did not significantly relate to the adolescent's perception of the aged.
- (3) The sex of the adolescent did not significantly relate to the adolescent's perception of the aged.

According to this data, 121 of the respondents had



living grandparents. Three of the respondents had nine living grandparents and one respondent had ten living grandparents. Response from these students indicated that they had plenty of elderly people with whom to have contact. Additionally, they took advantage of the opportunity to make contact with the elderly. Their responses relative to the best and worst things about being 65 and older varied widely. These comments pointed out the misunderstandings and inaccuracies of their conceptions of the aged.

#### Recommendations

Further research should attempt to do more than analyze the effect of mere contact with the aged. A measure of the quality, in addition to the quantity, of contact would add to present knowledge of what affects formation of attitudes toward the aged. One way to measure quality would be to ask the students to describe an experience they have had with an aged person and how they felt about the experience.

The researcher suggests the following approaches to the family life educator to help adolescents develop positive attitudes toward the aged. The teacher could provide contact with the aged by having older persons come to class as guest speakers or have students adopt an older person in the community to visit at least once a month. The family living class could study the later stages of the family

life cycle to better understand the aging process. Students could read and discuss current events and research findings concerning the aged in America in class. These discussions could lead students to a better understanding of the aged and the aging process. The attitudes of the students toward the aged could be analyzed by using the instrument in this study. It could be used as a pre-test and/or post-test when aging is studied.

The aging process needs to be taught to adolescents because now and in the future older people will make up a larger portion of the population. It is estimated by 2030 there will be approximately 65 million older persons. Therefore, adolescents need to learn about aging and how to cope with it.

Knowing how to cope with aging will enhance the adolescents' relationships with the aged, both currently and in the future. Additionally, such coping skills may enable them to age more graciously. If adolescents can be helped to understand aging as a natural phase of the life cycle, they can become more receptive to the concept of aging.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
INSTRUMENT USED IN STUDY

TEENAGERS  
OF THE  
AGED PERCEPTION





## TEENAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AGED

Directions: For the purpose of this study perception is defined as a mental image (how you feel). Aged is defined as a person 65 years of age or older. Please circle the answer which corresponds to your honest opinion.

Do you feel that persons 65 years of age or older ...

- Yes No 1. feel that young parents rear their children wisely?
- Yes No 2. feel secure?
- Yes No 3. are bossy?
- Yes No 4. make bad patients when ill?
- Yes No 5. usually look on the bright side of things?
- Yes No 6. tight with their money?
- Yes No 7. like to gossip?
- Yes No 8. think the future is hopeless?
- Yes No 9. are good company?
- Yes No 10. remember names well?
- Yes No 11. keep up with current ideas and events?
- Yes No 12. are fussy about food?
- Yes No 13. like to learn new ways of doing things?
- Yes No 14. feel that their children neglect them?
- Yes No 15. can take care of themselves?
- Yes No 16. meddle in other people's affairs?
- Yes No 17. approve of the younger generation?
- Yes No 18. prefer to support themselves?
- Yes No 19. are in the way of others?
- Yes No 20. are easy to get along with?
- Yes No 21. are out of step with the times?

- Yes No 22. are tidy and careful about their appearance?
- Yes No 23. are seldom bored?
- Yes No 24. have no interest in, or capacity for sex?
- Yes No 25. feel miserable most of the time?
- Yes No 26. have fewer accidents per persons than drivers under age 65?
- Yes No 27. are set in their way and unable to change?
- Yes No 28. take longer to learn something new?
- Yes No 29. are pretty much alike?
- Yes No 30. are lonely?
- Yes No 31. tend to become more religious as they age?
- Yes No 32. take a keen interest in politics?
- Yes No 33. are proud of their children?
- Yes No 34. are kind?
- Yes No 35. are good to children?
- Yes No 36. make friends easily?
- Yes No 37. enjoy life?
- Yes No 38. are critical of the younger generation?
- Yes No 39. are forgetful?
- Yes No 40. are easy to care for when ill?

We want you to share some personal information about yourself and your relationship with the aged. Respond to the following by placing your answer in the space to the left.

\_\_\_\_\_ How old are you?

\_\_\_\_\_ Are you male or female?

\_\_\_\_\_ How many living grandparents do you have?

For the next two questions, answer daily, weekly, monthly, twice yearly, or yearly.

\_\_\_\_\_ How often do you have contact (visit, call, write) with your grandparents?

\_\_\_\_\_ How often do you have contact (visit, call, write) with other older people?

Thank you very much for your cooperation

In your opinion - What would be the best thing about being 65 years old?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would be the worst thing about being 65 years old?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

CORRELATION REFLECTING RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN ADOLESCENT'S CONTACT  
WITH THE ELDERLY AND  
HIS/HER PERCEPTION  
OF THE AGED

CORRELATION REFLECTING RELATIONSHIPS  
 BETWEEN ADOLESCENT'S CONTACT WITH  
 THE ELDERLY AND HIS/HER  
 PERCEPTION OF THE AGED

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
13	F	8	18
13	F	7	23
13	F	8	11
13	F	9	15
13	F	8	24
13	F	8	14
13	F	9	32
13	F	9	22
13	F	6	31
14	F	8	18
14	F	4	25
14	F	8	17
15	F	7	29
15	F	8	23
15	F	7	19
15	F	7	22
15	F	7	18
15	F	9	28
15	F	9	31
15	F	5	29
15	F	8	13
15	F	8	19

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
15	F	2	23
15	F	4	19
15	F	6	28
15	F	7	13
15	F	8	20
15	F	7	17
15	F	5	21
15	F	5	20
15	F	8	21
15	F	7	29
15	F	9	33
16	F	6	18
16	F	7	20
16	F	8	17
16	F	10	22
16	F	6	24
16	F	7	26
16	F	8	33
16	F	9	19
16	F	5	23
16	F	10	28
16	F	8	12
16	F	3	29
16	F	9	18
16	F	7	17

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
17	F	4	30
17	F	7	22
17	F	4	28
17	F	6	33
17	F	5	17
17	F	8	16
17	F	7	26
17	F	5	13
17	F	6	18
17	F	9	20
17	F	3	25
17	F	9	27
17	F	5	28
17	F	9	30
17	F	8	38
18	F	6	16
18	F	7	14
18	F	7	26
18	F	6	24
13	M	7	16
13	M	4	36
13	M	0	32
13	M	7	33
13	M	0	29
13	M	3	28

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
13	M	10	21
13	M	7	23
14	M	5	19
14	M	8	19
14	M	6	26
14	M	6	22
14	M	5	12
14	M	9	24
14	M	7	32
14	M	6	19
15	M	6	26
15	M	4	24
15	M	6	31
15	M	9	22
15	M	4	30
15	M	9	20
15	M	3	21
15	M	7	22
15	M	10	27
15	M	0	22
15	M	9	26
15	M	4	13
15	M	9	15
15	M	3	9
15	M	8	18



<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
15	M	8	12
15	M	8	27
16	M	5	31
16	M	4	17
16	M	6	27
16	M	3	27
16	M	7	32
16	M	3	21
16	M	3	26
16	M	3	34
16	M	8	30
16	M	5	24
16	M	0	16
16	M	5	23
16	M	5	26
16	M	6	22
16	M	5	19
16	M	5	8
16	M	4	23
17	M	7	17
17	M	10	24
17	M	9	25
17	M	8	25
17	M	9	34
17	M	2	15

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>EXTENT OF CONTACT</u>	<u>PERCEPTION OF THE AGED</u>
17	M	8	25
17	M	7	21
17	M	7	10
18	M	3	18
18	M	5	16
18	M	7	33
18	M	5	37
18	M	7	18
18	M	10	23
18	M	9	25

\*The higher the number the more contact the adolescent had with the aged.

\*\*The higher scores indicate a more positive perception of older persons.

APPENDIX C

STUDENTS RESPONSES TO  
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

STUDENTS RESPONSES TO  
QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

<u>Items</u>	<u>13-15 Years Old</u>				<u>16-18 Years Old</u>			
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1	11	22	8	25	13	20	10	23
2	18	15	20	13	17	16	19	14
3	17	16	19	14	18	15	20	13
4	16	17	15	18	15	18	16	17
5	23	10	21	12	22	11	20	13
6	17	16	18	15	19	14	17	16
7	25	8	26	7	24	8	26	7
8	15	18	13	20	14	19	12	21
9	25	8	26	7	27	6	24	8
10	7	26	9	24	8	25	6	27
11	18	15	17	16	16	17	15	18
12	17	16	19	14	17	16	18	15
13	13	20	11	20	10	23	9	24
14	19	14	18	15	19	14	17	16
15	20	13	24	9	21	12	17	16
16	16	17	15	18	13	20	14	19
17	15	18	14	19	16	17	13	20
18	26	7	28	5	27	6	25	8
19	5	28	8	25	7	26	10	23
20	29	4	26	7	28	5	27	6
21	18	15	17	16	20	13	19	14

<u>Items</u>	<u>13-15 Years Old</u>				<u>16-18 Years Old</u>			
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
22	20	13	22	11	24	9	19	14
23	16	17	14	18	17	16	15	18
24	14	19	20	13	12	21	16	17
25	13	20	17	16	15	18	16	17
26	23	10	24	9	22	11	20	13
27	20	13	21	12	23	10	21	12
28	23	10	22	11	21	12	20	13
29	8	25	12	21	14	19	10	23
30	24	9	22	11	24	9	23	10
31	20	13	21	12	23	10	24	9
32	6	27	5	28	8	25	6	27
33	27	6	28	5	28	5	27	6
34	28	5	27	6	26	7	29	4
35	25	8	26	7	29	4	28	5
36	28	5	25	8	24	9	25	8
37	23	10	22	11	24	9	25	8
38	17	16	18	15	19	14	17	16
39	24	9	25	8	24	9	26	7
40	14	19	15	18	16	17	15	18

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Education: Graduated from Davenport High School, Davenport, Oklahoma, in May, 1975; received Associate of Arts degree in Home Economics from Northeastern A & M in May 1977; received Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics from Oklahoma State University in May, 1979; completed requirements for the Master of Science degree in Home Economics Education at Oklahoma State University in December, 1986.

Professional Experience: Vocational Home Economics Teacher for seven years at Lenapah High School, Lenapah, Oklahoma; Child Nutrition Consultant for the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Professional Organizations: Member of American Vocational Association, Oklahoma Vocational Association, American Home Economics Association, Oklahoma Home Economics Association, National Education Association, Oklahoma Education Association, American School Food Service Association, Oklahoma School Food Service Association, and Oklahoma State University Alumni Association.