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**AGEING POPULATION: CHALLENGE FOR NEW QUALITY OF  
SOCIAL POLICY**

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**Abstract**

As a share of older people in the whole population is continuously growing all over the world, policy makers face new challenges of tailoring social policy to the needs of older generation. To this end, the team of International Scientific-Educational Laboratory for the Improvement of Wellbeing Technologies of Older Adults of Tomsk Polytechnic University has organized two expert seminars with the participation of older people and social workers and officials. The feedback from the expert groups has revealed the importance of the state support of older generation in terms of providing the adequate pension rates, free and timely access to medical help and cultural events. Another crucial problem pronounced by social workers was a lack of informal (family) support or its ambiguity when it comes to older adults' benefits eligibility assessment. The results of expert seminars allowed making up a set of recommendations for a legislative body of Tomsk region.

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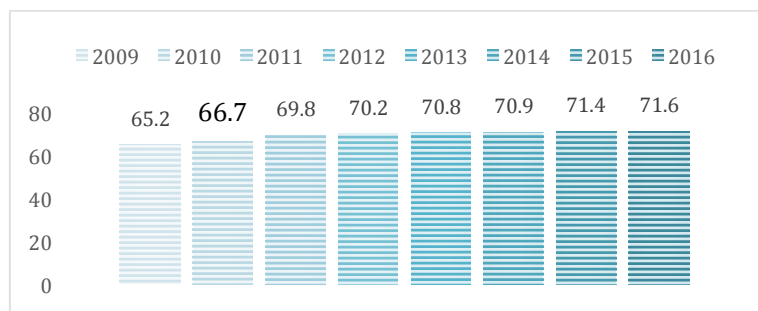
**Keywords:** Older people; wellbeing; social policy; subjective satisfaction; expert seminars.

## **1. Introduction**

The year of 2015 was marked by an important social and economic achievement for Russia: life expectancy has reached a historic high of 71.4 years for the entire observation period (Figure 1.) (RIA News, 2016). According to Healthcare minister V. Skvortsova, among the measures that contributed to the growth in life expectancy in Russia, the most important are the promotion of healthy lifestyle and a large-scale program of preventive examinations and health screenings, in which more than 80% of Russians have already participated over the last three years (Skvortsova, 2016). It is expected that by 2020, the life expectancy of Russian citizens will rise up to 74 years (Demography, 2016).



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**Fig. 1.** Life expectancy of Russian population, years.

These data raise well-founded optimism in society. However, the flip side of a significant increase in life expectancy are the new social and economic challenges posed by rapidly ageing population. It is known that the elderly represent the fastest growing age group in the world today. The UN estimates that every second 2 people reach the age of 60 years. At present, the number of elderly exceeds the number of children under 5 years old, and by 2050 their number will exceed the number of children and adolescents under the age of 15 years (Labour force statistics by sex and age, 2015).

According to the world standards, Russia is considered a rapidly ageing society: according to the data of the 1st quarter of 2016, the share of people above working age is 24% of the population. In Tomsk region, one in five is in this age group (Population, 2016). These facts explain the high relevance of the support and development of the person throughout his life to create conditions for improving the wellbeing of older people, the development of effective social policies focused on the special needs of older generation(The Strategy for Older Generation, 2016).

### 1.1 Problem Statement

At a recent meeting of the government, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said that "... we have been able not only to stop the mortality and reduction of the population, but also to achieve its increase, which, of course, is the result of the policy pursued by the state in recent decades" (Medvedev declared a record longevity in Russia, 2016). This statement needs clarification and specification. In order to consider a modern social policy effective in the Russian Federation, we must make sure that its guidelines and tools are recognized as such not only by the leaders of the country, but also meet the expectations of particular social groups – objects and subjects of relevant areas of social policy. To this end, the staff of the International Scientific-Educational Laboratory for the Improvement of Wellbeing Technologies of Older Adults conducted two scientific expert workshops in June 2016. Their aim was to assess the level of satisfaction of older people by the existing social policies aimed at ensuring their wellbeing. In addition, the workshops goal was to determine what areas of social policy to a greater extent affect the wellbeing of the elderly.

### 1.2 Research questions

The participants of the first workshop were older people (representatives of the city council of veterans, veterans' councils and organizations of Tomsk region). Participants of the second workshop were social workers and agencies, representatives of social security organizations of cities of Tomsk and

Seversk, for whom the wellbeing of older people is within the scope of professional activity. In total, 45 people participated in the seminars.

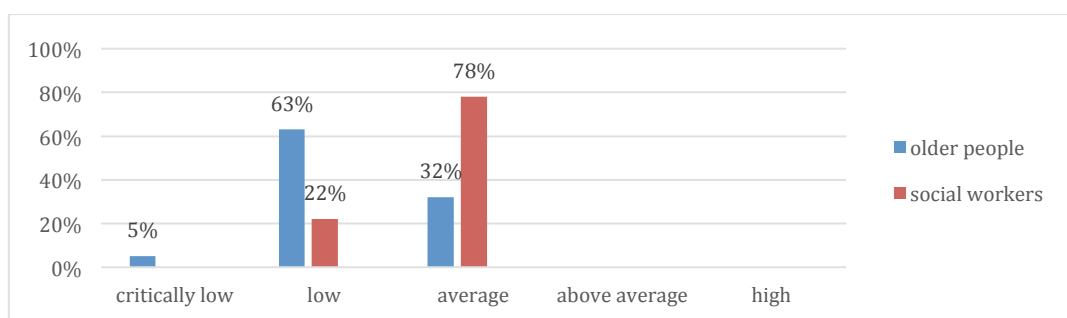
Before each workshop, the participants adopted a set of important definitions and assumptions concerning the basic terms used in the workshops. In particular, they agreed that the term "social policy" will mean a set of government measures in the field of social development and social security, aimed at improving the quality and standards of life of certain social groups (including the wellbeing of the elderly, improving quality and the duration of their life)(Burstein, 2013).

Among both workshops participants, no differences occurred in the definition of the main areas of social policy, ensuring the wellbeing of older people. They decided to include the following directions:

- Economic security (pensions, assistance with utility bills payment, payment of transportation costs, employment);
- Health (health care, prevention measures, long-term care);
- Ensuring the conditions for a decent life (enabling environment, communication, new knowledge, help in housework, support in difficult situations)(Köhli, 2007; Biggs, 2006).

The participants – elderly people – expressed the important opinion that their wellbeing is determined not only by the way they are treated by the family, society and state, but also depends on an older person himself (herself).

At the first stage of scientific and expert seminars, each group of participants was asked to give a personal assessment of the level of satisfaction of elderly people by existing social policies aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of this social group. The findings of the expert assessment workshops are presented in Figure 2. It is shown that in the opinion of seminar participants, the degree of satisfaction of social policy for older people does not deserve high and hardly even above-average ratings. Moreover, older people on average gave a pessimistic assessment (63% of respondents rated the degree of satisfaction of social policy for older people on a low level), and 5% of respondents estimate the degree of satisfaction of social policy towards the elderly at a critically low level. The dominant response (78%) of social workers have been evaluating the degree of satisfaction as average.



**Fig. 2.** Expert assessment of satisfaction level with social policy.

These assessments show that in society there is a request for an adjustment of social policies in this domain, and it is necessary to develop and implement social and economic solutions, focused on improving the wellbeing of older persons, including solutions at the regional level.

### 1.3 Purpose of study

To develop constructive proposals in order to level up the satisfaction of social policy aimed at improving the wellbeing of older persons, participants of scientific and expert seminars were asked to identify five criteria, which, in their view, make it possible to objectively assess the level of older people satisfaction by social policy and offer quantitative estimates, allowing one to evaluate the level of each selected criterion ranging from low to high values. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Matrix of criteria for assessing level of older people satisfaction with social policy (older people assessment).

Criterion, %	Critically low	Low	Average	Above average	High
1. share of pensioners receiving highly qualified medical care	6	14	32	52	80
2. share of medical help expenses in pension	67	50	32	19	8
3. share of utility bills expenses in pension	58	43	26	15	8
4. ratio of average pension and average wages in the region	23	29	47	64	84
5. share of state financing of educational and cultural activities for the elderly in pension	18	27	42	58	75

**Table 2.** Matrix of criteria for assessing level of older people satisfaction with social policy (social workers assessment).

Criterion, %	Critically low	Low	Average	Above average	High
1. ratio of average pension and average wages in the region	15	26	45	58	79
2. share of obligatory payments in pension	61	48	33	21	7
3. share of pensioners actually receiving medical care	16	33	53	74	97
4. share of elderly without family support	24	36	48	59	68
5. share of socially active older people	12	28	43	59	85

As we can see from Tables 1 and 2, the opinions of experts of both groups coincide in many respects. Older people, as well as social workers, agree that the main criteria for evaluating the satisfaction of social policy for the elderly are the level of income of older people, access to health care and quality characteristics of their daily lives. Moreover, the requirements for financial support of older people were higher when estimated by themselves, than estimated by experts who see the problem professionally. Note also that the desirable ratio of pension and the average wage in the region (estimated by pensioners and social workers as 84 and 79%, respectively) is twice higher than the actual level of this indicator in Tomsk region (based on the average wages in the first half of 2016 – 34958.3 rubles, and the average size of the labor pension – 13100 rubles).

## 2. Methods

At the next stage of expert seminars, the participants were asked to identify the main barriers to

improving social policy for the elderly and offer recommendations for the implementation of improving changes. Opinions on this matter pronounced by experts in each group are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The barriers and improving changes listed in a decreasing order of importance.

**Table 3.** Principle barriers for improving social policy related to older people and necessary changes (older people as experts)

Principle barriers	Improving changes
Corruption;	Strengthening state control over the observance of laws in social sphere;
Lack of control over the execution of state laws;	Enhancing the professionalism of social workers;
Low level of professionalism of social workers;	Increase of pensions rates to their compliance with 75% of the average wage in the region;
Low level of culture and spirituality of society as a whole;	Upholding ties between the salary of officials and older people satisfaction with social policy;
Double standards;	Financing social activities, including those related to the use of new technologies in work with the elderly;
Low awareness of seniors about their rights;	Developing a system of measures aimed at removing the obvious and (or) hidden age discrimination
Absence of (or vaguely formulated) national idea;	
Low GDP;	
Discrimination against the older generation	
Low level of government professionalism	

**Table 4.** Principle barriers for improving social policy related to older people and necessary changes (social workers as experts)

Principle barriers	Improving changes
The state of national economy;	Implementation of the national project "The wellbeing of older generation";
The lack of geriatric care (specialists);	Increase in pensions rate up to 50% of the average wage in the region;
Discrimination based on age when admitting to hospitals;	Training doctors on geriatrics, palliative medicine;
Double standards in society;	Business involvement in social projects (including the increase of social standards for services for the elderly to levels attractive to business);
Low salaries of social service employees;	Raising awareness of pensioners about measures of social support
Lack of professional deformation prevention measures;	Improving the status of social workers in the community (including economic: benefits package, salary);
Unpredictable institutional changes in social policy;	Creating multi-functional leisure centers
The high degree of social stratification in society	

### 3. Findings and Results

The results of the scientific and expert seminars conducted by the staff of the Laboratory with the participation of senior citizens and professionals of social services in Tomsk and Tomsk region were modified into recommendations to improve the wellbeing of the older generation and presented to the Legislative body (Duma) of Tomsk region. Key recommendations for improving the level of older people wellbeing are following the principle guidelines, such as increase in income security, improved health,

personal development and enabling environment for active ageing. Key stakeholders of the process are older people, local authorities, government organizations, businesses, NGOs, volunteers, using both traditional and new forms of collaboration and cooperation (including economic). Target indicators, suggested to monitor the wellbeing domains are:

1. Economic:
  - 1.1. The ratio of pension and the average wage in the region;
  - 1.2. The share of compulsory payments of the pensioner (utilities, transportation, medication, medical services, etc.) in pension;
  - 1.3. The share of older people in the total number of people employed in the labor market;
  - 1.4. Number of in-house programs for vocational training, retraining and advanced training for senior citizens;
2. Health-related:
  - 2.1 The number of social projects and projects in the field of health of older people, implemented through public-private partnership (PPP);
  - 2.2 The number of days waiting to receive medical help (including narrow specialists);
  - 2.3 The share of older people actually receiving medical treatment (including high-tech);
  - 2.4 The ratio of older people in need of long-term care and the number of older people receiving long-term care in hospitals;
  - 2.5 The number of geriatric and palliative care departments (beds per 1000 people) in health care establishments;
3. Activity-related:
  - 3.1 The share of older people participating in various forms of educational activities and programs;
  - 3.2 The share of older people actively involved in socio-cultural and political events;
  - 3.3 The number of district and regional establishments of social, cultural, educational, sporting destination that accommodates the special needs of the elderly;
4. Social:
  - 4.1 The share of the elderly and disabled, positively assessing the availability of infrastructure;
  - 4.2 The share of older people without the support of relatives and friends;
  - 4.3 The share of older people who have received help in difficult situations (natural disasters, fires, loneliness, loss of loved ones and others);
  - 4.4 Number of NGOs and volunteers involved in projects and activities aimed at improving the wellbeing of older people.

The expected result is to increase satisfaction of older people with social policies and increased social integration of society as a whole.

Diversification of social policies proposed to the Legislative Duma of Tomsk region to improve the wellbeing of older people is based on the official grading of older people in three age groups (60 to 64 years, from 65 to 80 years, over 80 years) (Strategy for Older Generation, 2016), and takes into account differences in their interests and (or) requirements.

## 4. Conclusion

Among the measures aimed at improving the wellbeing of the elderly from the first age group (60 - 64

years), we may focus on the stimulation of employment and activity, the creation of an integrated system of employment of older people (Erickson, 2010; Winkelmann, 2008; Nedospasova et al., 2016; Alartartseva, & Barysheva, 2016; Frolova, & Malanina, 2016).

Among the measures aimed at improving the wellbeing of older people from the second age group (65-80 years), special attention is to be paid to improvement of material well-being, the improvement of health, the development of personal potential, and enabling environment (Kroll, 2011; Dannefer, 2006).

Among the measures aimed at improving the wellbeing of older people from the third age group (over 80 years), greatest attention is to be paid to the development of stationary palliative care, hospital-replacing technologies, expanding the experience of "foster family", the formation of a socially responsible attitude of children to their parents at all levels of the education system and in media (Furlong, 2013).

It is important to note that the proposed recommendations take into account the specifics of the current economic situation, including a significant limitation of the local budget and require diversification of subjects implementing the proposed activities (Inglehart et al., 2008). Among them are not only local authorities and budgetary organizations and businesses, but non-profit organizations (NGOs), volunteers as well. The proposed recommendations aimed at the development of both traditional and new forms of collaboration and cooperation (including economic).

On September 12, 2016, the Board of the Legislative Duma of Tomsk region has approved recommendations to improve the wellbeing of older generation of Tomsk region, proposed by the team of the International Scientific-Educational Laboratory for the Improvement of Wellbeing Technologies of Older Adults of Tomsk Polytechnic University. The Laboratory together with the Tomsk region administration requested to develop a regional concept of the action for the older generation.

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