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AUTHOR Thorson, James A.
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ABSTRACT

The study reports on the use of the Kogan Old People (OP) scale, a 34-item Likert scale, in a variety of research applications. In the study's first phase, 59 subjects from three different training programs dealing with the elderly completed the OP scale. The results of this phase indicated that attitude toward old people became more negative as age of respondent increased. From these results it was hypothesized that race and social class might also affect attitudes toward old people. In phase two a group of high school students, all at nearly the same age and educational level, completed the OP scale. Grouping the respondents according to race and class produced no consistent pattern of differences in mean scores. Grouping the two samples indicated that no consistent pattern or increase in positive attitudes can be demonstrated by subjects' age. However, respondents having one or more years of higher education had a more positive attitude than the non-college group. Thus, among the groups tested, years of education appears to be an important factor contributing to variation in attitudes toward the aged. Sampling procedures were not random, so the results are not generalizable to a larger population. (JR)

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VARIATIONS IN ATTITUDE TOWARD AGING
AS A FUNCTION OF EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

A Paper presented to the
Adult Education Research Conference

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James A. Thorson
Department of Adult Education and
Center for Continuing Education
University of Georgia

It has been well-documented that older people are generally viewed as being somehow "different" from other people in our society (Golde and Kogan, 1959; Kogan and Shelton, 1962 A and B). Various studies have demonstrated that research subjects prefer to interact with, or care for, almost any other age group than the elderly (Altrocchi and Eisdorfer, 1962; Gillis, 1973; and Kastenbaum, 1964).

It can be seen that the views held by others toward a particular group to a great extent influence the status that will be accorded that group and the social position that its members will enjoy. If members of society generally view a particular group with contempt or prejudice, the members of that group will suffer from limited opportunities, constraints on a variety of their freedoms, and, perhaps, a negative self-image. It would take much more than the time allotted here to cite the vast amount of research that has been done on the negative effects and harmful influence of prejudice on such groups in American society as blacks, Chicanos, Jews, Puerto Ricans, Indians, women, Appalachian whites, orientals, various physical and mental illness minorities, and immigrants in general. The fact that older people are viewed as inferior and are accorded the status of a minority group has been well documented (Barron, 1953; Rose, 1965). Evidence of the fact that older persons feel that they are discriminated against is found in the growth of the Gray Panthers (Offen, 1972), a group patterned after other minority self-help and liberation organizations.

Like other social anti-discrimination movements, some legal battles have been won by advocates of the elderly. These are of a limited nature. The legislation forbidding age discrimination in employment, for example, does not

apply to those over age 65. Such large national organizations as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), are beginning to be more active in advocating reform. AARP is now entering into a number of test cases in the courts to challenge the constitutionality of mandatory retirement rules.

The acceptance of untrue stereotypes of the elderly has largely contributed to the formation of negative images. Much of the press coverage given the elderly has centered on the decrements of old age or on the plight of poverty-stricken older people. McTavish (1971), reports that, "Most investigators have remarked on the prevalence of erroneous and negative impressions about the elderly, an emphasis undoubtedly heightened as gerontological research provided documentation of 'facts' about society's aged" (p. 90). McTavish in 1971, and Bennett and Eckman more recently (1973), have extensively reviewed the literature in attitudes and perceptions of aging. McTavish calls for further research on explanatory variables and consequences of differing views of the aged. (p. 94).

"Stereotyped views of the elderly uncovered in various studies include views that old people are generally ill, tired, not sexually interested, mentally slower, forgetful and less able to learn new things, grouchy, withdrawn, feeling sorry for themselves, less likely to participate in activities (except, perhaps, religion), isolated, in the least happy or fortunate time of life, unproductive, and defensive in various combinations and with various emphasis" (McTavish, 1971, p. 97). (See also Riley and Foner, 1968, pp. 306-313)

Explanatory variables that have been discussed by other researchers are (McTavish, 1971, pp. 97-99):

--Age -- Most researchers report that fewer stereotypes and negative views about older people are held by older individuals.

--Sex-- Conflicting data is reported; there is no consensus among researchers as to whether males or females have more positive attitudes toward the aged.

--Social Class-- Again, there is conflicting evidence on this variable, some researchers reporting more negative views held by persons of lower socioeconomic status, others reporting little association.

--Ethnic group-- There is some evidence to indicate more negative images of the elderly are held by blacks than whites, although the research on this point is not conclusive.

--Family-- Those living with older people tend to have fewer stereotypes. (see also Tuckman and Lorge, 1958)

Early research on attitudes toward old people was done by Tuckman and Lorge (1952 and 1953), who developed a stereotype scale. Subjects were asked to accept or reject statements concerning the elderly. Later research (Axelrod and Eisdorfer, 1961; Eisdorfer, 1966) has demonstrated problems with the validity of the stereotype scale.

A more recent procedure for assessing attitudes toward old people has been developed by Kogan (1961), who constructed a 34 item Likert scale. It consists of 17 positively and 17 negatively-phrased statements about older people that subjects are asked to agree or disagree with. Silverman (1966) reports that the Kogan Old People scale (OP) has predictive validity and low response-set bias.

The present study reports on the use of Kogan OP scale in a variety of research applications. The data reported should not be regarded as definitive; this is the report of what is essentially hypothesis-building research. The study of correlates of attitudes toward old people is still on-going. The present paper discusses preliminary findings.

My colleagues and I (Thorson, Whatley, and Hancock, 1974) reported last year on our first use of the Kogan Scale. A total of 59 subjects from three different training programs in dealing with the elderly presented by the Georgia Center for Continuing Education were asked to complete the OP scale. These persons were professionals and para-professionals in agencies serving older persons. For comparison purposes, 61 graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Georgia also completed the OP scale. Means on the OP scale were calculated and comparisons were made by age level and years of education of respondents:

FIGURE I

Mean Scores of Sample Group I by Age

| <u>N</u> | <u>Age Group</u> | <u>Mean*</u> |
|----------|------------------|--------------|
| 15 | Under 22 | 4.75 |
| 58 | 22 to 35 | 4.73 |
| 21 | 36 to 55 | 4.39 |
| 25 | Over 55 | 4.33 |

*higher mean score indicates a more positive attitude toward old people

A consistent pattern can be seen in Figure I, with attitude toward old people becoming more negative as age of respondent increased. A t test indicated that those subjects aged 35 and under had a significantly ($p < .01$) more positive attitude toward old people than those over age 35.

Figure 2

Mean Scores of Sample I by Years of Education

| <u>N</u> | <u>Years of Education</u> | <u>Mean</u> |
|----------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 9 | 8 or less | 4.20 |
| 20 | 8 to 12 | 4.28 |
| 61 | 12 to 16 | 4.67 |
| 30 | Graduate School | 4.70 |

In Figure 2, a consistent pattern can be seen, with positive attitudes toward the elderly increasing with subjects' years of education. A pronounced and significant ($p < .01$) difference in attitude can be seen between the subjects having one or more years of college education and those having no college. Again a t test was used to determine significance in this case. Note that no analysis was done to determine which variable, age or education, contributed most to the variance in attitude.

From these preliminary results, it was hypothesized that race and social class might also be variables having an effect on attitude toward old people. Although neither race nor social class was indicated for the original 120 subjects, it was supposed that black respondents had fewer years of education and a lower socio-economic level than the whites. This would compound the results of the first study.

An effort to test for the effect of the factors of race and social class was made in the second phase of the study. A group of high school students, all of whom were at nearly the same age and education level, completed the Kogan OP Scale. A panel of teachers who know the students were asked to code their questionnaires as to subjects' race and social status. Figure 3 indicates mean scores for this group:

FIGURE 3

Mean Scores by Race and Social Status, Sample group II

| <u>N</u> | <u>Variable</u> | <u>Mean</u> |
|----------|----------------------|-------------|
| 37 | black, lower income | 4.19 |
| 11 | black, middle income | 4.05 |
| 9 | white, lower income | 4.13 |
| 41 | white, middle income | 4.12 |

For the variables of race and social class, no consistent pattern of differences in mean scores can be detected. There were no significant differences

between the four groups' mean scores when tested using an analysis of variance procedure.

Scores for samples I and II were combined for comparison purposes on the variables that were known for all test subjects, age and education. A total of 217 questionnaires were usable in making this comparison:

FIGURE 4

Mean Scores for Samples I and II by Age

| <u>N</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Mean</u> |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| 113 | Under 22 | 4.32 |
| 58 | 22 to 35 | 4.88 |
| 21 | 36 to 55 | 4.37 |
| 25 | over 55 | 4.34 |

With the two groups combined, it can be seen in Figure 4 that no consistent pattern of increase in positive attitudes can be demonstrated by subjects' age. Rather, the highest group is in the age range from 22 to 35, while the three other age groups are almost at the same mean score. The higher score for the 22 to 35 age group might be explained instead by the possibility that this is a college-aged group of subjects, and that education level is a more important variable than is age.

FIGURE 5

Mean Scores for Samples I and II by Years of Education

| <u>N</u> | <u>Years of Education</u> | <u>Mean</u> |
|----------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 9 | 8 or less | 4.28 |
| 117 | 8 to 12 | 4.17 |
| 61 | 12 to 16 | 4.67 |
| 30 | Graduate Work | 4.70 |

Figure 5 demonstrates the gulf in attitude between those having one or more years of higher education and the non-college group. The question remains, however, of which factor makes the greatest contribution in the variation of

subjects' attitudes toward old people, although education presents a clearer pattern than does age.

FIGURE 6

| Analysis of Variance by Group and Variable | | | | |
|--|---|----------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>N</u> | <u>Variable and Sample Group</u> | <u>f</u> | <u>f_{.95}</u> | <u>f_{.99}</u> |
| 98 | Sample Group II, by race and Social Class | .177 | 2.70 | |
| 217 | Samples I and II, by subjects' age | 2.22 | 2.65 | |
| 217 | Samples I and II, by subjects' education | 9.24 | 2.65 | 3.88 |

Figure 6 presents data indicating where the variation does in fact lie. The f score for the variables of race and social class does not approach significance. The f score for the variable of age, 2.22, approaches the 2.65 score needed to demonstrate significance at the .05 level, but is not high enough. The variation clearly lies in years of education, where the f score is a good deal higher than the 3.88 f needed to establish significance at the .01 level.

Implications

What has been demonstrated here is not that education is the principal factor influencing people's attitudes toward the elderly. Rather, among the groups tested, years of education appears to be an important factor contributing to variation in attitudes toward the aged. Sampling procedures were not random and results are not generalizable to a larger population.

One important point to note is that the t test data from sample I was misleading when it was interpreted that both age and education were significant variables. The analysis of variance was able to differentiate between variables to indicate which one contributed most to the difference in attitude.

Conclusions that might be drawn from this data are that, for purposes of further research, the variables of race and social class do not offer much promise of influencing attitudes toward old people. Subjects' age does seem to contribute to variation in attitude but not to any great degree. In a follow-up study, it might be hypothesized that years of education would be an important element to test for in comparing attitudes.

As a footnote, the third part of this study is taking place now. Data on 200 subjects is being gathered to test for correlations between attitudes toward old people and the 15 different personality traits measured by the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule.

Correlates of years of education would seem to be a promising direction for further research. Obviously, there is some relationship between educational level and socio-economic status. A more obvious relationship that has not been investigated is between attitudes and subjects' intelligence. It would appear obvious that there is a direct, positive correlation between intelligence and years of education, although, of course, one is not a predictor of the other. A relationship might well, then, exist between intelligence and attitudes toward old people.

A possible explanation for the relationship demonstrated by the present data is that those subjects having more years of education are less likely to accept untrue stereotypes of older people.

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