

Older people in the structure of local society - results and experiences of the panel survey in Nyíregyháza

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The aim of the presentation is to explore the situation of the elderly based on the results of an urban panel study. The lecture examines the position of older people in local society in three areas: their distribution across income strata representing positions in the social structure, the possibility of precarity among the elderly, and their subjective health status.

The presentation also addresses the theoretical and conceptual issues related to these three areas. Based on the literature, old age is a relative concept, with three main approaches and dimensions identified in definitions: chronological (Neugarten, 1974; Baltes & Baltes, 1990), biological-functional, and social-cultural (Laslett, 1995). It can also be observed that in the literature, the ideal of active, quality aging has replaced earlier passive perspectives (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).

The presentation investigates income-based stratification, a widely used approach in sociology. Empirical research indicates a high proportion of “middle strata” within these categories. Tóth István György also emphasizes that the relative share of the income-based middle strata is relatively high in Hungary (2016). A third interpretive framework is linked to the theory of the precariat (Standing, 2011; Fónai & R. Fedor, 2023). The term “precariat” derives from the words *precarious* and *proletariat* and denotes a growing social class, emerging in recent decades, positioned at the bottom of the class-based hierarchy of contemporary capitalism (with several “sources,” one of which is the elderly). Its fundamental characteristic is labour market insecurity and vulnerability, which developed as a crisis of welfare capitalism.

The presentation analyzes the results of a panel survey launched in 2008 by the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Debrecen, conducted in Nyíregyháza across six waves of data collection. The panel’s sample remained relatively stable during the initial period of research, with “panel attrition” becoming noticeable only after 2018, a trend further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, due to statistical weighting, the results provide a reliable picture of the situation of the city’s population. The survey examined household composition, income and labour

market characteristics, as well as the educational attainment, health status, and social networks of household members. The database also included an age variable, enabling comparisons between different age groups.

The six survey waves show that the income position of the elderly is relatively favourable they belong to the city's middle strata and their exposure to precarious processes is low, partly due to the limited extent of elderly employment. However, they assess their subjective health status as poor. A linear relationship can be observed between age and the evaluation of health: with advancing age, individuals increasingly perceive their health as worse.

Reference

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