



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS N° 33

WHEN DOES THE OLD AGE START? – OPINION OF THE HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

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Demographic aging, the rising share of the elderly population due to increasing life expectancy and low fertility, is a well-documented social phenomenon in developed countries. It has an effect on the sustainability of social subsystems, for instance on the pension- and the health systems. At the same time, individuals' social duties are also transforming, and their healthy life expectancy is also increasing. Due to this complex process, the opinion of the Hungarian society about the perceived age of becoming

old has also changed. According to the results of the Hungarian *Generations and Gender Survey*, which is a demographic panel study, the adult population in 2016 puts the age of becoming old 3 years later than in 2001. In 2016, the 24-75-year-old population marked the lower level of old age at the age of 68.3. Typically, women indicated a higher age. Moreover, surveyed people gave a higher age, if they were older themselves or higher educated (Table 1).

Table 1. The perceived age of becoming old among the population between 24–75 years

Social characteristics	2001	2008	2016
Population aged 24–75	65.3	66.4	68.3
Gender			
Male	64.6	65.5	67.3
Female	65.9	67.1	69.1
Age groups			
24–29 years old	64.6	64.9	65.8
30–39 years old	65.4	65.4	67.2
40–49 years old	64.7	66.3	68.3
50–59 years old	65.0	66.2	68.4
60–69 years old	66.0	67.6	69.3
70–75 years old	67.2	68.7	70.1
Educational attainment			
Elementary school	64.5	65.5	67.2
Vocational school	64.3	65.6	67.7
Secondary school	66.3	67.0	68.5
Tertiary education	67.4	67.8	69.4

Source: Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey, 2001, 2008, 2016; own calculation.

Hungarians generally connect old age with the worsening of health, the dependence on others, and the decline of mental capabilities. Less than the quarter of the population thinks that retirement is an important characteristic of old age, and being a grandparent is associated with old age even less likely.

The attributes of old age that the respondents considered important show surprisingly great stability in time. The important characteristics of old age were mentioned by the respondents almost in the same order in 2001 as in our last survey of 2016 (Table 2).

Table 2. What is the main feature of old age? – Proportion of the given attributes of old age among the population aged 24–75

Features	2001	2016
Over age 65	36.1	37.6
Bad health status	49.8	48.6
Can not take care for him/herself	61.2	58.7
Bad mental status	51.6	55.0
Pensioner	22.1	23.7
Can hardly adapt to change	35.0	30.7
Can not solve problems	29.3	29.6
Have grandchild	7.5	8.0

Source: Hungarian Generations and Gender Survey, 2001, 2016; own calculation.