

Exploring Stereotypes of old age: Perceptions among university psychology students in Colombia

Explorando los estereotipos de la vejez: percepciones entre estudiantes universitarios de Psicología en Colombia

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SUMMARY

Social perception of the elderly is often based on stereotypes that do not always reflect reality, significantly influencing attitudes and behaviors towards them, especially among those in caregiving roles. This study uses the Old Age Stereotype Instrument (CENVE) and attitude scales to examine stereotypes and attitudes toward old age among psychology students. A mixed sequential design was used, prioritizing quantitative and qualitative data collection. The results of the CENVE questionnaire show that negative stereotypes predominate in the dimensions of health (M=13.26) and character-personality (M=13.49), indicating a perception of physical and mental deterioration in older people. In contrast, the motivational-social dimension shows a lower mean (M=11.99), suggesting a lower perception of inability to work and loss of interest

in old age. Comparative analysis between groups reveals no significant differences, while correlational analyses show positive associations between negative stereotypes and attitudes toward old age ($p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings highlight positive attitudes, such as respect and wisdom, and negative attitudes, such as helplessness and exclusion. It is concluded that negative stereotypes of older people are common among students, which may influence their future professional practice. It is, therefore, crucial to review curricula to strengthen training on issues related to older people and ensure that future graduates understand this demographic group better. Higher education should address these stereotypes to prepare professionals to provide empathetic and non-judgmental care and contribute to a society that values and supports its elders fairly and equitably.

Keywords: Stereotypes, old age, attitudes, university education, social perception.

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RESUMEN

La percepción social de las personas mayores suele basarse en estereotipos que no siempre reflejan la realidad, lo que influye significativamente en las actitudes y comportamientos hacia ellas, especialmente entre quienes desempeñan funciones de cuidadores. Este estudio examina los estereotipos y las actitudes hacia la vejez entre los estudiantes de psicología utilizando el Instrumento de Estereotipos sobre la Vejez (CENVE) y escalas de actitudes. Se utilizó un diseño secuencial mixto, dando prioridad a la recolección de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos. Los resultados del cuestionario CENVE muestran que los estereotipos negativos predominan en las dimensiones de salud ($M = 13,26$) y carácter-personalidad ($M = 13,49$), lo que indica una percepción de deterioro físico y mental en las personas mayores. Por el contrario, en la dimensión motivación-social se obtuvo una media más baja ($M = 11,99$), lo que indica una menor percepción de incapacidad para trabajar y pérdida de interés en la vejez. El análisis comparativo entre grupos no revela diferencias significativas, mientras que los análisis correlacionales muestran asociaciones positivas entre los estereotipos negativos y las actitudes hacia la vejez ($p < 0,001$). Los resultados cualitativos ponen de relieve actitudes positivas, como el respeto y la sabiduría, y negativas, como la impotencia y la exclusión. Se concluye que los estereotipos negativos sobre las personas mayores son comunes entre los estudiantes, lo que puede influir en su futura práctica profesional. Por lo tanto, es crucial revisar los planes de estudio para reforzar la formación sobre temas relacionados con las personas mayores y garantizar que los futuros licenciados tengan un mejor conocimiento de este grupo demográfico. La enseñanza superior debería abordar estos estereotipos con el fin de preparar a los profesionales para que presten una atención empática y sin prejuicios y contribuyan a una sociedad que valore y apoye a sus mayores de forma justa y equitativa.

Palabras clave: Estereotipos, vejez, actitudes, educación universitaria, percepción social.

INTRODUCTION

Population aging is one of the great advances in today's society. In Colombia, by 2050, according to Lee et al. (1), it is expected that 18.7 % of the population will be 60 years of age or older, making this a relevant cause for concern because this aging of the population will lead to a decrease in the country's economic growth since the costs derived from meeting the needs of this population group will grow much faster than the resources to ensure its sustainability. Even so, the existing

perception of aging, old age and the image of the elderly does not have the social recognition and value that it should (2).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (3), age discrimination is increasingly recognized as a public health problem and as one of the most prevalent forms of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. It is important to note that the knowledge that currently exists on the measures used to be able to know the prevalence and magnitude of discrimination is limited, as pointed out by Officer and de la Fuente-Núñez (4) and Wilson et al. (5). Social exclusion, according to Iversen et al. (6) includes three dimensions: (i) stereotypes, (ii) prejudice and (iii) discrimination.

The image of the older adult presents prejudices, stereotypes, and negative attitudes, being very important in the study and analysis of these perceptions at a psychosocial level since, as indicated by different studies (7,8), beliefs and behaviors influence different groups within society such as older adults themselves, young people, children, health professionals and family members of older adults. Although such age discrimination can affect any age group, there is evidence showing how older adults are at greater risk of suffering negative consequences. In this line, it has been shown that negative and exclusionary attitudes due to age affect both the functional and cognitive performance of older adults (9), as well as worse mental health (10) and greater morbidity (11).

Research with college students reveals that stereotypes about older people are predominantly negative. Given the growing increase in the older population, it is crucial to eliminate these stereotypes to foster a positive view of themselves among the elderly. Some authors differentiate stereotypes from other related social phenomena, such as attitudes and prejudices. Ayalon (12) highlights these differences with three components: behavioral (discrimination), affective (prejudice), and cognitive (stereotypes). Psychological research on negative stereotypes towards old age (ageism) is essential because these beliefs negatively affect the habits and self-perceptions of older people and also influence the behavior of others towards them, regardless of their age group, social group, or familiarity, including health professionals (7,13-15,8).

According to Losada-Baltar (16), negative stereotypes towards old age have a relevant impact on how society, in general, and social and healthcare professionals, in particular, may adopt practices detrimental to the well-being of older people, perpetuating negative stereotypes and making it difficult to change them. According to the *self-fulfilling prophecy*, older people may behave according to their perceived negative self-image (17), negatively affecting their aging and quality of life and reducing their active aging (18). Research in this area has shown misconceptions about aging (19).

In the professional setting, ageist biases tend to describe older people with negative traits, which can lead to discriminatory professional practices (16). Thus, Casado et al. (20) point out that direct and indirect discrimination can manifest itself through exclusion or the imposition of unjustified age limits in the early detection of diseases. This leads to older people receiving more frequently organic diagnoses, such as dementia, and different treatments, such as a greater preference for pharmacological treatments, compared to younger people. This approach may contribute to developing pathological aging styles (21).

In terms of mental health, negative stereotypes about age contribute significantly to the limited care received by older persons with psychological problems. The pessimistic beliefs of professionals related to personality changes, rigidity, dementia, loss of cognitive functions, depression, and loneliness, among others, foster a therapeutic nihilism. This is a barrier for older people to access psychosocial intervention services (22).

Considering this, the role of health professionals is crucial to dismantle false myths about old age. Abreu and Caldevilla (23) argue that university students' attitudes in the socio-health area can influence the quality of care that older people will receive in the future. Studies with university students in various areas of knowledge show a negative image of old age and a lack of positive stereotypes towards older people (24-27).

Dobrowolska et al. (25), in their study with a sample composed of people over 65 years of age and medical and nursing students from Poland, observed that the conceptualization of old age as reported by older people and students had mainly

negative connotations, reflecting the deeply rooted stereotypes within society regarding older people. For their part, older people reported being exposed to age discrimination and witnessed episodes of it. Along the same lines, Fernandez et al. (28) found that, in their research with young and older adults, the most stereotyped dimension was character and personality, while the least stereotyped was social relationships and motivation. The health dimension occupied an intermediate position. Regarding the perspectives studied, older adults (hetero-stereotypes) were the most stereotyped, followed by young students and older adult students regarding self-stereotypes. For their part, Salmeron et al. (29), in their study with university students of Social Education, found stereotypes towards old age. However, these stereotypes diminish as they advance in their academic training, although they do not disappear completely at the end of their studies. The study highlights the need to revise the curriculum to increase knowledge about the elderly.

Considering the above and the social responsibility that the University assumes regarding teaching, research, and dissemination of knowledge (30), it is relevant to evaluate the negative stereotypes towards old age in the field of higher education. This is done by taking as the object of study influential agents in socialization and care who will shape the future of the next generations (31). Therefore, the objective of this research is to analyze the perception of old age in university students of the Psychology program of UNAD, articulated with the courses of Developmental Psychology, Psychopathology of Adulthood and Old Age and Psychosocial Action and Education, focusing specifically on the existing negative stereotypes towards the elderly.

METHODS

Design

This study was based on a sequential mixed design, characterized by an initial phase in which quantitative data are collected and analyzed, followed by a stage in which qualitative data are collected and examined. The mixed combination occurs when preliminary quantitative results guide qualitative data collection. Notably, the

second phase built on the findings of the first phase. Finally, the results of both phases were integrated to interpret and elaborate the final results (32).

Sample

The sample consisted of 445 National Open and Distance University UNAD psychology program students who signed the voluntary informed consent form to participate in this research. Their ages ranged from 18 to 63, with 60.6 % between 18 and 35 and 39.3 % between 30 and 63. Regarding sex, most of the participants in this study were women, 85.6 %, while only 14.3 % were men. The inclusion criteria were students enrolled in the psychology program at UNAD, aged 18 years or older, and who provided signed informed consent to participate in the study. Exclusion Criteria included students who were not actively enrolled in the psychology program during the data collection period and participants who withdrew their consent or failed to complete the required components of the study.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical research principles involving human participants, including respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Participants were fully informed of the aims, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study, and their voluntary participation was ensured by signing informed consent forms. Data collection began with the students' informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Data included both quantitative and qualitative components such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups to explore perceptions and eating behaviors. Data confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the study in accordance with national and international ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Instruments

Questionnaire for the evaluation of negative stereotypes towards old age CENVE

This questionnaire measured beliefs about negative stereotypes associated with old age through a Likert-type scale from 1 to 4. The questionnaire assesses three factors, each with scores ranging from 5 to 20 points. For the Health dimension, this instrument covers beliefs about the deterioration of physical and mental health in old age; for the Motivational-social subscale, this scale assesses perceptions about the lack of affection, interests, and work capacity in the elderly, and for the character-personality subdimension, it focuses on beliefs about the mental and emotional rigidity of the elderly (33). For this study, this questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Questionnaire of Attitudes to Old Age CAV - Adolescents

The Old Age Attitudes Questionnaire (CAV), developed by Hernández-Pozo et al. (34), consists of 21 items that are answered using a four-point Likert scale. Its objective is to measure three factors related to negative attitudes towards aging: negative stereotypes, fear of old age, and fear of loss of intellectual faculties and abandonment. This instrument has good reliability ($\alpha = 0.831$) and is relevant for focusing exclusively on negative attitudes towards old age, measuring the degree of negative associations this topic provokes. For this study, this scale had a reliability index of 0.84.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program. Initially, descriptive and frequency statistics were used for the descriptive part, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for the correlational component.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis of Old Age Stereotypes

Considering the results of the Old Age Stereotype Instrument (CENVE), the mean in the subdimensions of Health and Character-Personality is slightly higher (M=13.26; M=13.49).

This indicates that the studied population presents a higher level of negative beliefs

towards old age associated with general health deterioration. These beliefs include the perception of cognitive and memory impairment, as well as the occurrence of mental illness and emotional lability, which weakens the status of the older adult. On the other hand, the results in the Motivational-Social subdimension are slightly below the mean (M=11.99). This suggests a lower belief among participants about the inability of older adults to perform work activities and a less negative perception about the loss of vital interest in old age (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of variables of negative stereotypes towards old age.

Variable	Media	Standard deviation
Health	13.26	2.902
Motivational - Social	11.99	2.864
Character personality	13.49	2.983
CAV	38.74	7.750

Comparative Analysis between Groups

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore whether there are significant differences between participants in relation to

the Old Age Stereotypes Instrument. The results (Table 2) indicate no significant differences between the groups compared by sex since the significance values exceed the typical level of significance (p>0.05).

Table 2. Comparative analysis between groups.

	Gl	Root mean square	Sig.
Health	1	14.131	0.196
Motivational-Social	1	0.107	0.909
Character-personality	1	9.830	0.294
CAV	1	52.158	0.352

Note: Comparative analysis between groups of variables related to negative stereotypes towards old age. Values include degrees of freedom (Gl), Root Mean Square error (Root Mean Square), and significance level (Sig) for each variable analyzed.

Attitudes towards Old Age

Regarding attitudes towards old age (Table 3), the results show average levels in the dimensions of negative physical and behavioral stereotypes (M=20.44) and fear of aging (M=7.42). In

contrast, higher levels were found for fear of suffering cognitive deterioration in old age (M=23.65). This suggests that while students have fears of physical and behavioral changes associated with aging, fear of mental illness and memory deficits is more pronounced.

Table 3. Attitudes toward old age

Variable	Media	Standard deviation
Negative physical-behavioral stereotypes	20.44	5.103
Fear of aging	7.42	2.829
Fear of intellectual deterioration and neglect	23.65	4.987

Note: Analysis of attitudes towards old age, including mean and standard deviation of variables related to negative physical and behavioral stereotypes, fear of aging, and fear of intellectual decline and neglect.

Comparative Analysis by Gender

Although previous studies suggest that women tend to have a greater fear of aging and cognitive impairment, in this research, no significant differences were found between

sexes in the dimensions studied (35,36) due to beauty stereotypes that demand specific patterns appropriate to the body, all of which reproduces patterns that promote discrimination against those who do not conform to these demands (37).

Table 4. Comparative analysis by gender

	Gl	Root mean square	Sig.
Negative physical-behavioral stereotypes	1	0.743	0.866
Fear of aging	1	8.748	0.296
Fear of intellectual deterioration and neglect	1	33.287	0.248

Note: Comparative analysis of attitudes towards aging by gender, presenting degrees of freedom (Gl), Root mean square error (Root mean square), and significance values (Sig) for the variables of negative physical and behavioral stereotypes, fear of aging, and fear of intellectual decline and neglect.

Correlation Analysis

Finally, correlation analyses were conducted to establish significant relationships between the studied variables (Table 5). The results yielded significant positive correlations between negative stereotypes toward old age and attitudes toward old age ($p < 0.001$ in all cases), indicating that scores on one scale increase, and so do scores on the other scales. This suggests a positive association between these variables, which could have important implications for understanding how different dimensions of aging-related stereotypes and fears interrelate in the population studied.

Subsequently, in addition to the quantitative scales, after the data analysis process at the quantitative level, the students participated in various sessions that generated dialogues, reflections, awareness, and commitments toward the elderly in society.

Positive and Negative Attitudes Toward Older Adults

Students in the psychology program were asked about their positive and negative attitudes toward older adults. Terms that stood out in relation to positive attitudes included Love, Wisdom,

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Table 5. Pearson correlations

		Negative physical-behavioral stereotypes	Fear of aging	Fear of intellectual deterioration and neglect
Health	Pearson Correlation	0.296**	0.817**	0.281**
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
	N	445	445	445
Social motivation	Pearson Correlation	0.359**	0.652**	0.306**
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
	N	445	445	445
Personality	Pearson Correlation	0.406**	0.688**	0.339**
	Sig. (bilateral)	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
	N	445	445	445

Note: (**p < 0.001)

Knowledge, Respect, Experience, Courage, Admiration, Empathy, Joy, and Gratitude.

These positive attitudes highlight valuable aspects of old age, such as the accumulation of wisdom and experience, the respect and admiration students feel towards older adults, and the empathy and gratitude they show. These perceptions benefit older adults and the community in general, creating a kinder and more supportive environment and promoting respect and intergenerational solidarity. On the other hand, negative attitudes were reflected in concepts such as Neglect, Abandonment, Rejection, Forgetfulness, Fragility, Intolerance, Detachment, Neglect, Mistreatment, Disrespect, and indifference.

These terms reveal negative and stigmatizing perceptions that students have regarding older adults, associating them with vulnerability and social exclusion. These attitudes highlight the need to promote education and awareness about aging and value older adults as valued community members.

Impact of Stereotypes on Aging

Throughout history, old age has been the subject of negative stereotypes and preconceived ideas that associate it with physical and mental decline, dependence, and lack of productivity. These stereotypes, deeply rooted in society, are not only inaccurate and discriminatory but also have a profound impact on the lives of older people, affecting their social, educational, and health well-being.

In the social context, stereotypes of old age can lead to exclusion and discrimination. Older people may be seen as a burden on society or worthless individuals, limiting their opportunities to participate in community and productive life. An example is early retirement, often seen as a way of “getting rid” of older workers rather than recognizing their experience and potential to continue contributing to society.

In the educational setting, stereotypes of old age can discourage older people from continuing to learn and develop new skills. The belief that

older people are less capable of learning can lead to low self-perception and a lack of motivation to participate in educational activities. This is reflected in the low participation rates of older people in educational and training programs, depriving them of the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills that will enable them to remain active and contribute to society.

In the context of health, stereotypes of old age can negatively affect older people's perception of their own health. The idea that old age is synonymous with illness and frailty can lead to resignation and a lack of interest in taking care of one's health. This can have dire consequences, such as neglect of preventive health, adoption of unhealthy lifestyle habits, and self-medication.

Detailed Analysis

Impact on the Health Area

According to the participation, the impact of stereotypes on health is approached from an integral perspective, considering both physical and psychological health. Beauty stereotypes and aesthetics influence the perception of the self, affecting the mental health of older adults and leading to low levels of motivation, self-esteem, and self-concept. In addition, diseases related to cognitive and degenerative alterations can put the older adult in conditions of disability, affecting their autonomy due to dependence on third parties. Devaluation and prejudice can result in insufficient medical care, allowing preventable diseases to progress (Table 6).

Impact on the Social Area

Stereotypes in the social context can lead to discrimination and social exclusion of older adults, making their work and trajectory invisible. This has a negative impact on their mental health, increasing the risk of mental illness. Responses from the attendees indicate that older adults are often ignored and vulnerable, seen as incapable of actively participating in society. This isolation can lead to low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness (Table 6).

Impact on the Educational Area

Negative stereotypes in education can discourage older adults from learning and developing. Beliefs about their supposed inability to learn reduce their participation in educational activities. Attendees mentioned that current learning strategies are complex for older adults, which is a significant challenge. Discrimination and ridicule toward older adults who wish to study also discourage their participation. However, it is important to recognize that many older adults possess a wealth of experience and knowledge that can enrich the learning of younger generations.

After these sessions, we reflected on positive and negative attitudes toward older adults in the health, social, and educational areas. According to Bratt and Fagerström (38), attitudes can be positive or negative, resulting from generalized experiences in society. From this, it can be deduced that attitudes are apprehended and learned from the context in which older adults live. Attitudes are variable, and social representations play an important role in the meanings established in the context of this stage of development because of interactions with the environment that guide behaviors (Table 6).

One student said: *"I am an Indigenous student, and really they, within our communities, are guardians of the ancestral memory of my people, who transmit knowledge, wisdom, and sense of belonging to our people."* From the above, it can be visualized how, for some communities, older adults inspire love, respect, knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Their life stories keep the customs, traditions, and customs of the communities, constituting the identity that sustains cultural survival and strengthens affective bonds familiarly and socially. Kang and Kim (39) mention that the positive attitudes that older adults have towards their own old age are related to high levels of well-being. It is important to highlight that belonging to a group and feeling valued and identified gives them a life full of activities and social interaction.

On the other hand, Menéndez et al. (40) mention that there are negative stereotypes as biased or false ideas with a negative connotation that one social group has over another, leading to hostile behaviors, discrimination, and rejection

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Table 6. Detailed analysis of student responses on the impact of stereotypes.

How do stereotypes about old age affect health care?	How do stereotypes about old age affect the social area?	How do stereotypes about old age affect education?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cognitive impairment and motor impairment. - Until people understand that mental health is important for good physical health, they will continue to live in the last century. - They feel isolated from the outside world, lack of self-esteem, which leads to adult despair, leading to cognitive illnesses. - Loss of good care in a timely manner because of your age because you will die. - Health is reflected in the fact that not all people are given the same medical attention, because sometimes the most vulnerable people are excluded, and they do not realize that we all deserve attention; they think that because they are old, they are close to death. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They can no longer contribute to anything; some are even embarrassed to go out with their grandparents. - The exclusion before the society that they are ignored and violated sees them as incapable of giving a public opinion to the society. - Low self-esteem, lack of belonging to a social group or being considered - There is general isolation, and they take advantage of their vulnerability to abuse it. - In this case, according to the stereotypical beliefs in the social part of the stage of adulthood and old age, they think that these elderly people are socially isolated, sick, fragile, and dependent on other people, and some of them are present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is remarkably affected because interest in learning is lost. - It affects the way of learning since there are no ways to dynamize this learning. - Today's learning strategies are very complex for an older person who wants to update himself. It is a challenge for which he needs a lot of vitality; perhaps that is his biggest obstacle. - Stereotypes often cause adults to feel discouraged or hesitant when expressing their desire to study. Since they are judged, in many cases, they make fun of their manifestation. - We must teach children and adolescents to value their grandparents, people of the golden age because they are full of wisdom. We must tell them that they can teach them many things so that they can continue with their legacy.

towards a particular group, specifically negative stereotypes about old age.

According to the above, we find some phrases that students refer to: *“It is considered that old people, because they do not work, do not have a commanding voice in the home”*; *“They consider them outdated with the new generations in terms of new technologies and communication methods”*; *“Exclusion before society, that they are ignored and violated, they see them as people incapable of giving a public opinion to society”* These reflections lead us to think about how these stereotypes directly or indirectly affect this population, violating their being and forgetting that they are beings

They think, feel, and need to relate and be valued by others with rights, history, and culture that give them identity, making them people of knowledge, wisdom, tenderness, experience, and many other characteristics.

The qualitative results of this study highlight the duality of perceptions that university students have toward older adults. While some positive attitudes highlight respect and admiration,

negative attitudes reveal the persistence of stereotypes that can lead to exclusion and discrimination. These findings underscore the importance of educational and awareness-raising initiatives that promote a more balanced and respectful view of aging, recognizing the value and continued contribution of older adults in society.

In addition, the CENVE questionnaire to measure stereotypes showed that the students who participated in the workshop presented unfavorable stereotypes about old age. Along these lines, Henríquez et al. (41) consider that, by addressing this problem, it will be possible to change society's attitudes towards the elderly. The challenge for psychology is to continue investigating the conditions and ways of acting coherently with old age that generate processes that mobilize the territories, providing this population with a true sense of life and well-being.

It is crucial to address these stereotypes in a comprehensive manner, promoting continuing education, equitable health care, and social inclusion of older adults to improve their quality of life and overall well-being.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that the population studied had a significant tendency to hold negative beliefs about aging, especially regarding physical and mental health. The CENVE results show a slightly higher mean in the subdimensions of Health ($M=13.26$) and Character-Personality ($M=13.49$), indicating that the population studied presents significant negative beliefs towards old age, especially associated with general deterioration of health and related personal characteristics. These suggest a predominant perception that aging inevitably entails a decline in physical and mental health. This view may negatively influence how older people perceive themselves and how they are treated by society. Precisely, the Health subdimension reflects concern about chronic diseases, declining physical capacity and dependency, and factors commonly associated with aging. Concern about these conditions affects not only older adults themselves but also society's perception and attitude toward them, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. In addition to physical concerns, the CENVE results also highlight beliefs about the onset of mental illness and emotional lability, accompanied by behavioral regressions that undermine the status of the older adult. The population studied appears to be more fearful of suffering from mental illness or memory deficits associated with cognitive decline, suggesting that mental health in old age is seen as one of the most vulnerable and stigmatized areas.

The impact of these perceptions is profound. Negative beliefs toward health in old age can lead to the internalization of these stereotypes by the elderly, affecting their self-esteem and overall well-being. In addition, they can influence policies, and the quality of health services directed at this population. A negative view may result in less investment in prevention and health promotion programs for the elderly, perpetuating a cycle of expected and unmitigated deterioration. Negative beliefs can also affect the daily interactions and quality of life of the elderly, contributing to a sense of devaluation and exclusion.

Promoting a more balanced and positive view of aging is essential to counter these stereotypes.

Evidence shows many older people lead active, healthy, and fulfilling lives. Policies and programs encouraging physical activity, social participation, and access to quality health care can help challenge and change these negative perceptions. Initiatives such as intergenerational education, promoting healthy habits, and creating inclusive community spaces can effectively improve perceptions of aging.

Mental health varies according to the older adult's integration and sense of social belonging, in contrast to isolation, discrimination, exclusion, and loneliness. An older adult with an active life may feel valued and socially useful, while those who feel lonely, isolated, and with a passive life may experience the invisibilization of their work and an interruption in their life project. This underscores the importance of strengthening support networks and encouraging the active participation of older adults in society. In addition, awareness and education about aging are essential to combat negative stereotypes. Educational programs involving people of all ages can help change perceptions and promote a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of aging. Promoting stories and examples of successful and active aging can also challenge negative stereotypes and provide positive role models.

In conclusion, analysis of the CENVE results highlights the urgent need to reshape perceptions of aging, particularly among psychology students uniquely positioned to become agents of change in this area. As the world's population ages, future psychology professionals must recognize the impact of negative aging stereotypes on the health and well-being of older adults. These beliefs, often manifested in misconceptions about physical and mental health, not only affect the self-perception and well-being of older adults but also shape the interactions and attitudes of health professionals toward this population.

Therefore, psychology students must become agents of change by becoming aware of these dynamics. A critical approach to age-related prejudices and stereotypes will enable them to identify and challenge these harmful beliefs both in their academic environment and in their future professional practice. This involves not only reviewing theoretical concepts about aging

but also reflecting on how these concepts impact the way they work with older adults.

Integrating a more positive and realistic perspective on aging into their academic training will enable students to develop empathy and understanding. This is vital as empathy is crucial in psychological care and treatment. If future psychologists understand that old age can be a time of growth, learning, and enjoyment, they will be better equipped to support their older patients with their challenges and promote fulfilling lives.

In addition, training in this area needs to be accompanied by practical experiences that allow students to interact with older adults in various settings. Direct exposure to the stories and realities of older adults can challenge stereotypes and provide concrete examples of active and healthy aging. These experiences include volunteer programs, placements in care homes, or intergenerational projects encouraging interaction between young and old.

By adopting a more inclusive and empathetic approach, psychology students will not only contribute to improving the self-esteem and quality of life of older adults. Still, they will also promote a fairer and more inclusive society. In this context, it is essential to promote recognition and respect for diversity of experience at all stages of life. This will help to create an environment where the voices of older adults are heard and valued and where their ability to contribute meaningfully to society is recognized.

Therefore, psychology students' training should include a critical review of beliefs about aging, promoting a more positive view and developing skills that foster empathy and understanding. This approach will benefit not only future professionals but also their patients. It will also play a key role in building a culture that values older people, recognizing their dignity, wisdom, and potential to continue contributing to society.

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