



FROM YOUTH TO ELDERLY: EXPERIENCES, ATTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Considering the analysis of the roles of religiosity and its impact on health, risk behaviors, and well-being as classic, research about the impact of religiosity on optimism in the elderly has been neglected. Indeed, in the ageing process religiosity has been shown to be associated with important benefits.

Aims: This research focuses on two age groups – youth and old age – and the impact they have on life satisfaction, attribution of personal successes or failures, and expectations regarding the future. We also wanted to compare the future expectations of both, as well as attitudes and religious and political values, in these two important and differing stages of life.



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Method: The sample is composed by 609 Portuguese citizens, 250 elderly over 65 years old and 359 young students between 15 and 25 years old. All the participants answered to the *Religious Beliefs in Life Situations Questionnaire* (Mónico, 2010).

Conclusions: We found that the elderly showed moments of life in the past and in the present less favorable, although they reported less current family and love problems in comparison with young. The daily living differed from the young people due to higher scores in feelings of inner peace and caution, while lower in joy, optimism, happiness and facilities. Older people attributed their personal success significantly more to the personal help of God, while the failures to bad luck in life, lack of divine aid and injury caused by others. The greatest fears are related to death and the occurrence of fatal diseases. They showed lower future expectations concerning positive achievements, but also less willing to achieve these accomplishments.

Key-words: elderly; youth; attributions; future expectations.

Introduction

Given the duplication of the number of people over 65 years, what happened in our country over the last four decades (from 1 to 2 million), and the reduction of 3 for 2 million for young people up to 14 years in the same period of time (Barros, 2008), this research focuses on two age groups – youth and old age – and the impact they have on life satisfaction, attribution of personal successes or failures, and expectations regarding the future. Specifically, we intend to analyze life satisfaction in young and elderly, given the self-perception and the attribution of successes and failures over the life. We also wanted to compare the future expectations of both, as well as



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attitudes and religious and political values, in these two important and differing stages of life.

Method

The sample is composed by 609 Portuguese citizens. Were surveyed 359 young people ($min = 15$, $max = 22$ years; $M = 20.85$, $SD = 1.96$ years) who attended the 2nd and 3rd cycle of Basic Education and Higher Education from schools belonging to the Centre and North of the country and 250 elderly ($min = 66$, $max = 89$ years; $M = 74.87$, $SD = 6.77$ years), with qualifications up to 6th grade.

A survey by a self-administered questionnaire was chosen. We built the *CRSV Questionnaire*, acronym for *Religious Beliefs in Life Situations* (Mónico, 2010). After ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of responses, we asked for the informed and voluntary consent of the participants to answer to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to the elderly, mostly, in a structured interview format. We used the SPSS version 19.0 for statistical data analysis.

Results

Self-perception of current and past life

We found that young people perceive their life as significantly more favorable, both in the present, $t(607) = 10.25$, $p < .001$, as in the past, $t(607) = 6.85$, $p < .001$, when compared with the elderly. *Figure 1* represents the average scores of two questions: "Today you're experiencing a life situation" from very bad (1) to very good (5) and "in the past, in general, you consider that your life was" from very bad (1) to very good (5).



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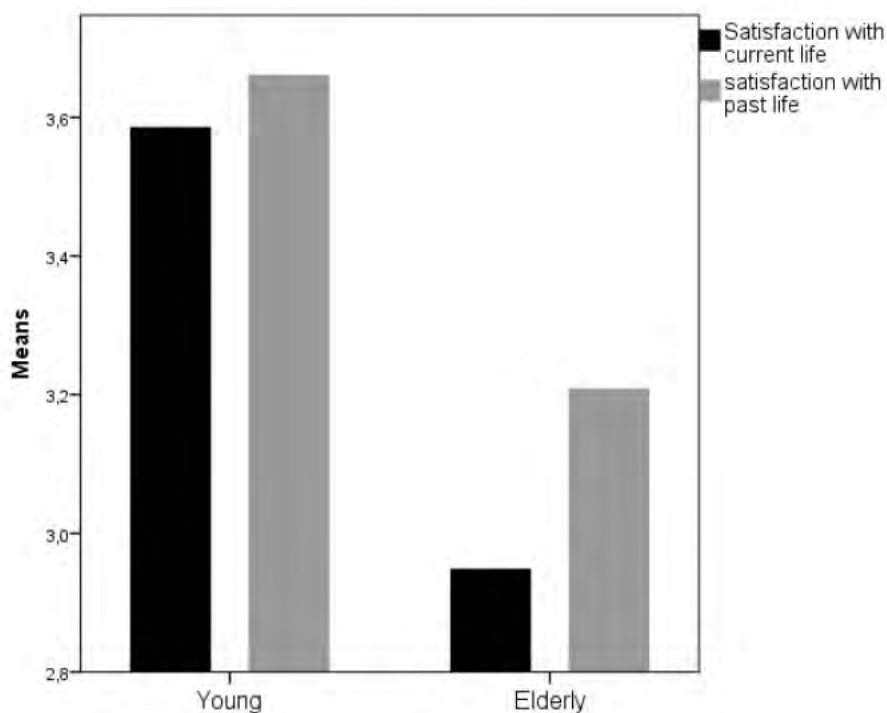


Figure 1 – Satisfaction with current and past life: Mean scores

Current problems

Young people have more academic problems than the elderly, $\chi^2 (1) = 98.28, p < .001$, love problems, $\chi^2 (1) = 43.70, p < .001$, and professional problems, $\chi^2 (1) = 6.34, p = .02$, while the elderly indicate significantly more physical health problems, $\chi^2 (1) = 107.72, p < .001$ (see Figure 2).



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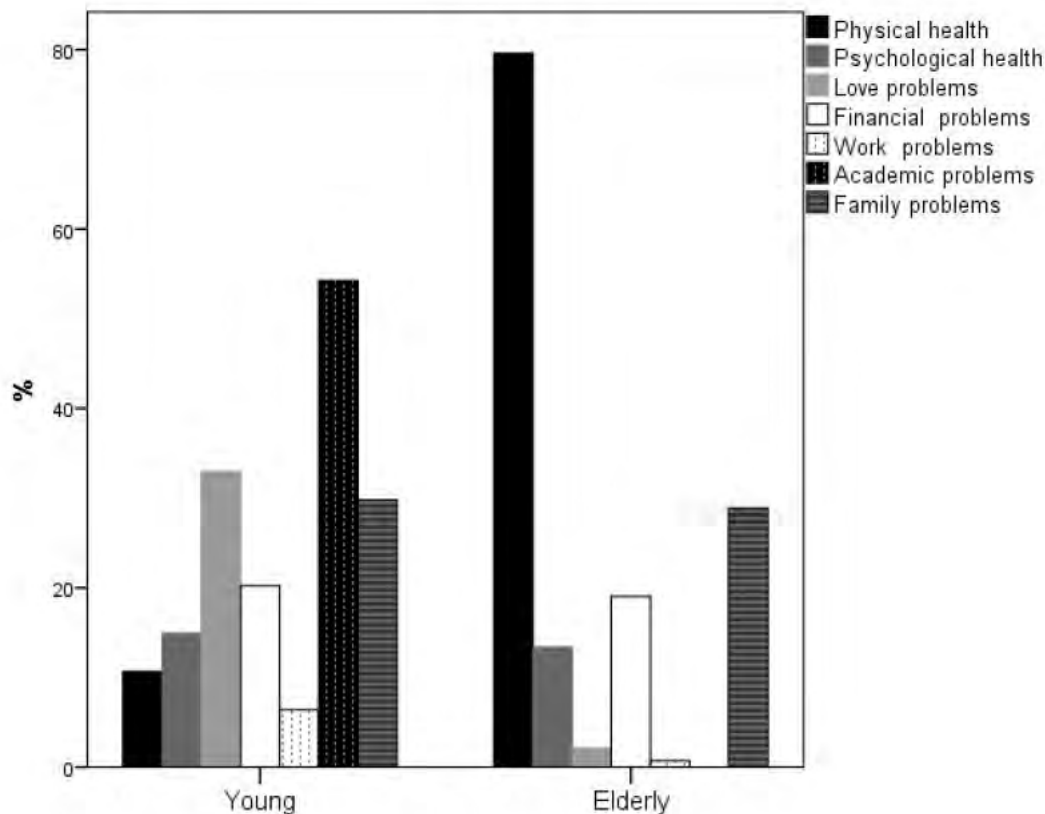


Figure 2 – Fields of current life problems: Percentages

Difficult life situations

Considering the question “in your life you've been through very difficult situations”, from 1 (almost never – 0 to 20% of the times) to 5 (almost always – 80 to 100% of the times), young people showed lower scores ($M = 2.18$, $DP = 0.93$) regarding the elderly ($M = 3.04$, $DP = 1.02$), Mann-Whitney $U = 24605$, $p < .001$.

Among the many areas concerning the very difficult life situations, excluding physical health, work, and financial problems, significantly less reported by the young



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people [respectively, $\chi^2 (1) = 154.82, 15.36$ e $55.21, p < .001$], the younger have already passed significantly more for very difficult situation sin academic, love, and psychological areas [respectively, $\chi^2 (1) = 111.94, 14.92$ e $43.71, p < .001$], as shown in *Figure 3*.

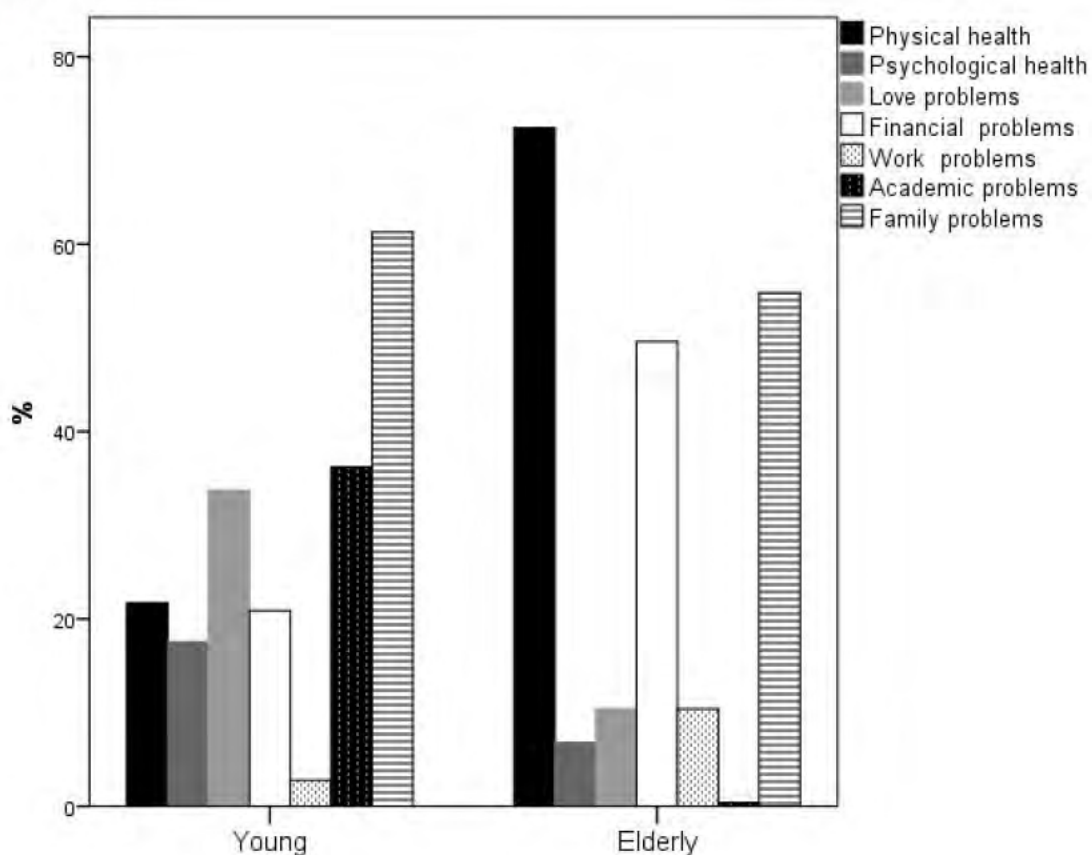


Figure 3 – Experience of difficult life situations: Percentages

Self-perception of daily life



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The analysis of the way the participants perceive their daily lives (measuring scale from 1 to 7 points) shows a clear behalf of young people regarding the elderly [Wilks' $\eta^2 = 0.607$, $F(16, 592) = 23.94$, $p < .001$]. The elderly are more visible only in inner peace, $F(1, 607) = 10.34$, $p = .001$. There was no difference in terms of security, tranquility, and feeling that they show their best, $F(1, 607) = 0.09$, 0.55 , and 1.20 , $p > .25$ (see Figure 4).

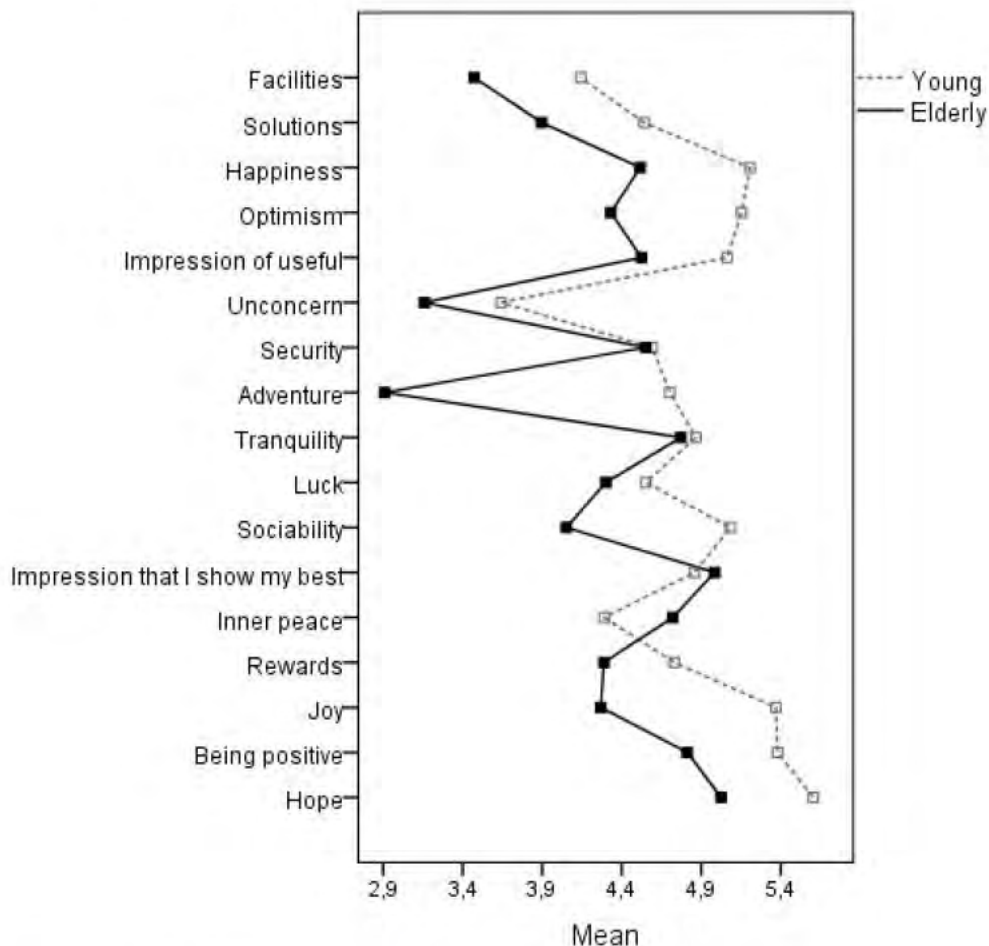


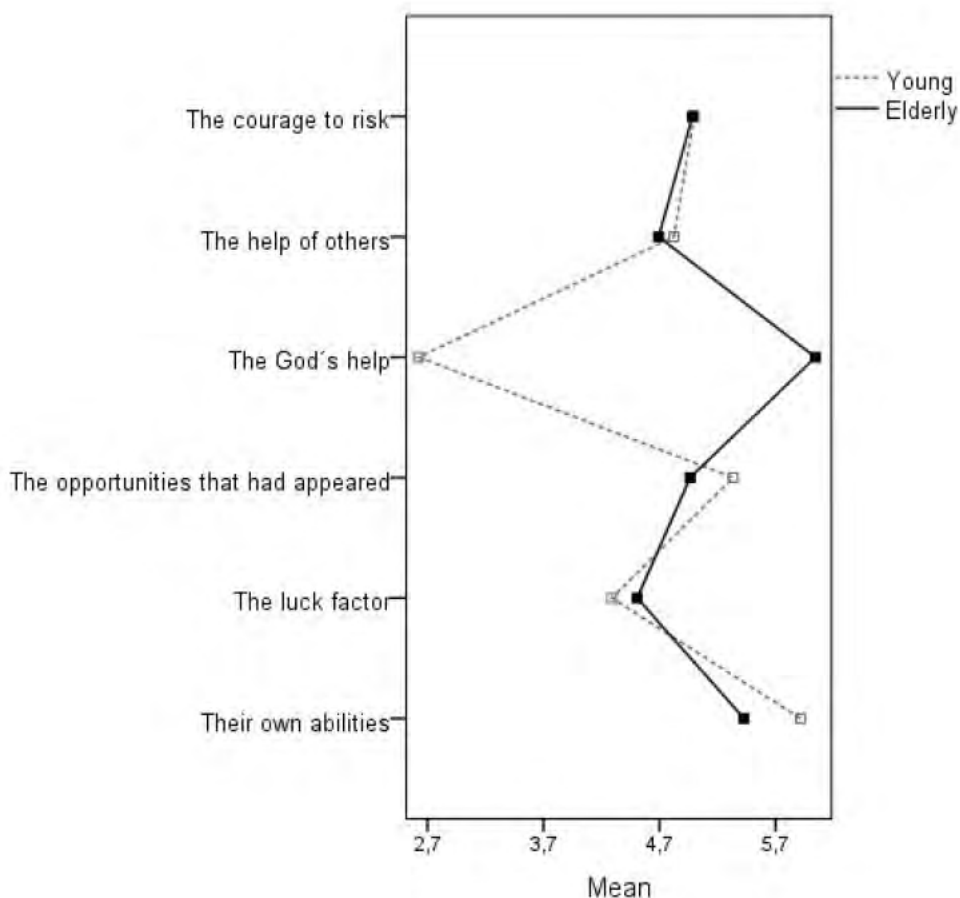
Figure 4 – Self-perception of daily life: Mean scores



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Attribution of personal successes and failures

We found that young and elderly people attribute their successes to different causes: $Walds' \chi^2 = 0.520$, $F(6, 602) = 92.74$, $p < .001$, measuring scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The attributions of the youngest are more focused on their own personal skills and in the opportunities that had appeared, $F(1, 607) = 23.08$ and 10.30 , respectively, $p < .001$. The elderly attribute their successes significantly more to God's help, $F(1, 607) = 467.37$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 5).

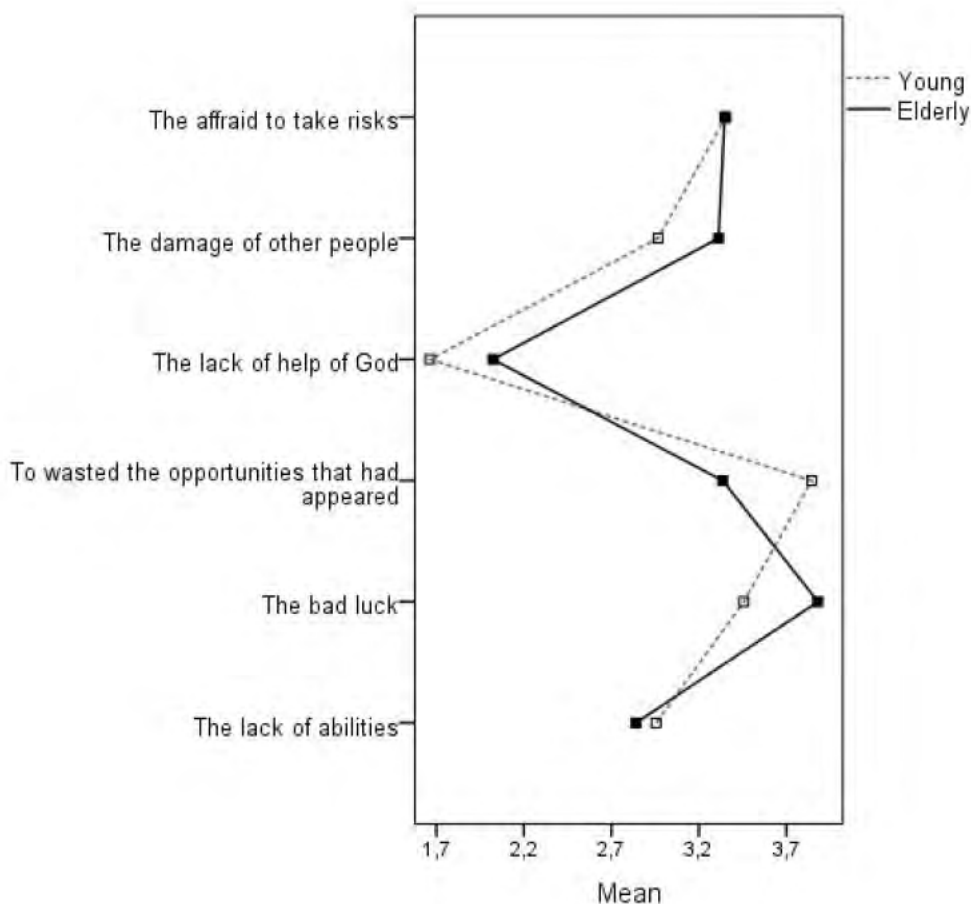




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Figure 5 – Attribution of successes throughout life: Mean scores

Concerning the attribution of failures throughout life, we also found significant differences: $Wilks' \lambda = 0.943$, $F(6, 602) = 6.09$, $p < .001$, measuring scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Elderly people attribute their failures more to the bad luck, the damage of other people, and the lack of help of God – namely, $F(1, 607) = 8.46$, 5.37 , and 9.90 , $p < .05$. Young people have wasted more opportunities that had appeared throughout life, $F(1, 607) = 12.06$, $p = .001$ (see Figure 6).





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Figure 6 – Attribution of failures throughout life: Mean scores

Attitudes, values and political and religious opinions

Elderly are less interested in politics and have a more right-wing political orientation in comparison with young people, $F(1, 607) = 53.15$ and 133.14 , respectively, $p < .001$. They also show more conservative attitudes and are more in favor of initiation of children in a specific religion (e.g., catechism), $F(1, 607) = 260.05$ and 188.56 , respectively, $p < .001$. However, young and elderly do not differ concerning the attitude towards economic liberalism and freedom of religious expression, $F(1, 607) = 0.88$ and 0.87 , respectively, $p > .30$ (see graphical representation of the average scores in *Figure 7*).



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Figure 7 – Attitudes, values and political and religious opinions: Mean scores

Estimate of futures occurrences, fears and wishes

Considering the likelihood of occurrence of positive and negative future events (estimates from 0 to 100%), we found that the elderly estimate and wish for less positive occurrence in the future (measuring scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; see Figures 8 and 9), $F(1, 607) = 9.57$ e 8.19 , respectively, $p < .01$.



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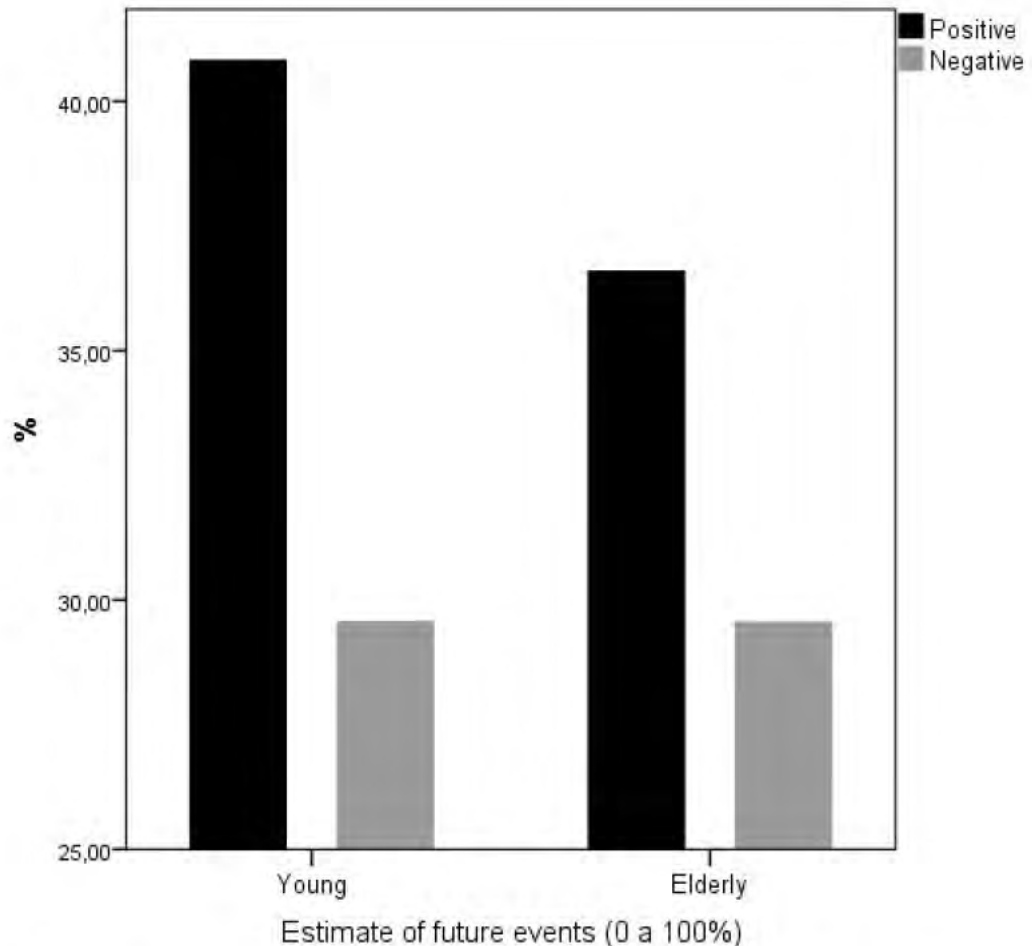


Figure 8 – Estimate of positive and negative future events: Percentages

Figures 8 and 9 highlights the percentages of estimation of positive and negative future events in the elderly and in the youth. As regards the negative future events, elderly and youth did not differ(0 to 100%), $F(1, 607) = 0.00, p = .995$, although the elderly have less fear of these events (measuring scale from 1 to 7 values), $F(1, 607) = 7.77, p = .01$.



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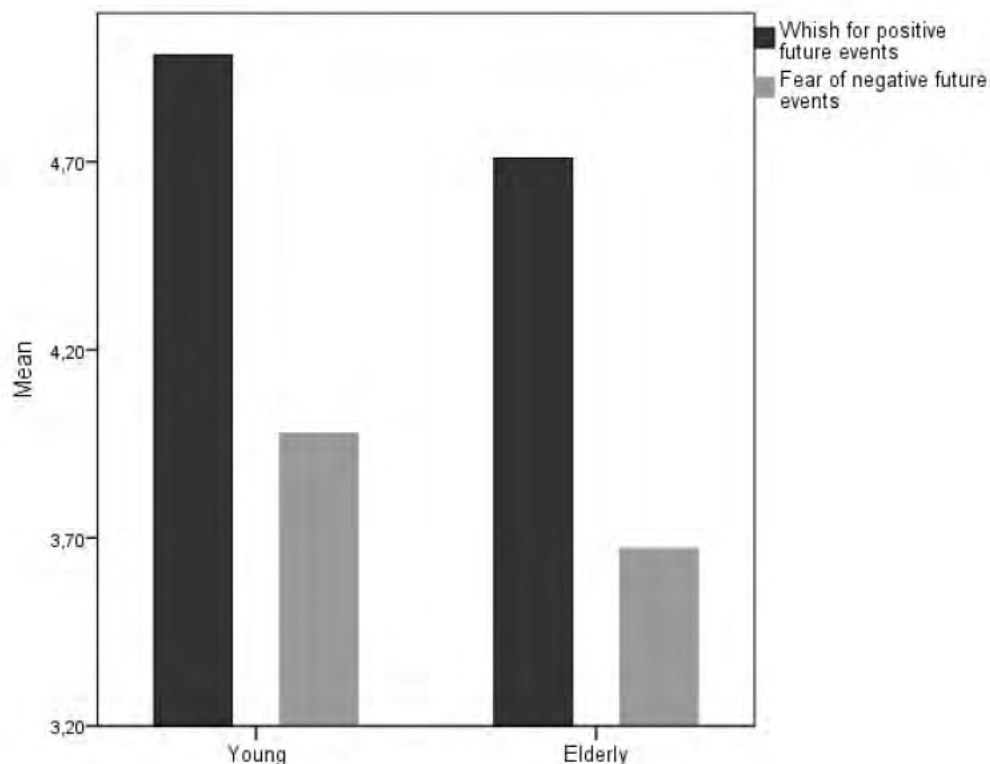


Figure 9 – Whish for positive future events and fear of negative future events: Mean scores

Conclusions

Experiences, perceptions, and personal attributions showed to be clearly influenced by the stage of life of participants. The elderly display less favorable life situations in comparison to the youngest, mainly due to the lack of physical health. Exception for current life with inner peace, higher in the elderly. They also attributed their personal successes significantly more to the help of God, while the failures to bad luck, lack of divine help and damage caused by others. On the other hand, they



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showed less interest in politics and a more liberal and right-wing political orientation, with no differences regarding economic liberalism and freedom of religious expression. They also showed less positive future expectations and desire of positive achievements, although they estimate equal future negative occurrences in comparison with young people.

5. References

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