

Seventh International Congress of Gerontology

Vienna-Austria, June 26th-July 2nd 1966

The 7th International Congress of Gerontology was held at the previous Hofburg-palace. There were 2,000 participants from 44 countries (at the 6th Congress in Copenhagen there were 900). They listened to 21 lectures during plenary sessions and to a 1,000 papers (Copenhagen 500) in one of the 11 congress-rooms. Interest for this congress was therefore very big. That this was so could also be derived from the fact that a selection of papers to be presented had to be made which resulted in holding back 800 papers. If this selection would not have taken place it would have been even more difficult to obtain a realistic overview of the ideas and findings which were brought to the fore at this gerontological market. Therefore this report contains a rather personal evaluation with special emphasis on the social-gerontological contributions.

Firstly, we want to pay special attention to methodological questions. Secondly some attention will be given to the various themes within the separate social-scientific disciplines. Lastly we want to conclude with some remarks about theorizing and training in gerontology.

When we compare the present situation with the one at Copenhagen, it appears that now—three years later—much more *longitudinal research* is carried out. Besides this research often has an interdisciplinary character, most of which is carried out in the United States of America. The oldest research project here is the well-known "California Longitudinal Studies" by JONES, Berkeley, *et al.*, of which the subjects now are 35 to 45 years of age.

Other interdisciplinary longitudinal research project with special emphasis on the biological clinical aspects have been carried out sofar by SHOCK *et al.* (Baltimore), BUSSE *et al.* (Durham, North-Carolina), M.F. COLLEN (Oakland), A. I. GOLDFARB (New York) and W. D. OBRIST (Durham, North-Carolina); purely biological longitudinal research projects sofar have been those of O. GSELL *et al.* (Basel) and J. BROZEK *et al.* (Minneapolis, Minnesota); primarily psychological longitudinal research has been carried out sofar by K. F. RIEGEL (Ann Arbor, Michigan), K. W. SCHAE (Morgantown, West-Virginia) and by J. H. BRITTON *et al.* (University Park, Penna).

As much longitudinal research has only started shortly, the discussion mainly concerned the general design and organization of the research. Special attention was paid to the problem of the "survivals" and of the restricted possibilities for comparing data. Strangely enough hardly anything was said about the problem of the halo-effect as a consequence of the repeated use of psychological measurement methods.

Interdisciplinary research also increases. Of this research we like to mention: Cardiovascular disease and intellectual changes in the elderly (L. W. THOMPSON, C. EISDORFER *et al.*, Durham, North-Carolina); Relationships between alpha brain wave frequency, age, heart disease and intelligence (M. APFELDORF *et al.*, New York); The psychologic evaluation of a program of estrogen administration for older women (H. I. KANTER *et al.*, Dallas, Texas), and Social adjustment in the aged (M. F. LOWENTHAL, USA).

Cross-national research is another approach to problems about which one does not easily obtain sufficient information in cross-sectional research. In Vienna a number of researchers (SHANAS, TOWNSEND, STEHOUWER) discussed various aspects of a cross-national research project which has been carried out in the United States of America, Great-Britain and in Denmark. Though this research revealed only little cultural variation between the three countries, it is nevertheless expected that the cross-national

approach can be very useful. R.J. HAVIGHURST (Chicago) and H. THOMAE (Bonn) introduced a symposium with respect to another cross-national research project which still is in the pilot-study phase: "A Pilot-study of schoolteachers and steelworkers". In this research project 5 aspects of 14 social roles are looked into with 70-75 years old people. Participating countries in this project are Austria, France, Germany, Great-Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the United States.

The symposium paid special attention to methodological implications, the possibility of comparison of the data from the various countries via uniform social roles rating-scales and to some tentative conclusions and hypothesis.

As a matter of course most research is still *cross-sectional*. However not always does this research make use of control groups of another age or of groups living in different circumstances. It has become clear on the other hand that also biologists and clinicians have become more acquainted with statistical methods and procedures, though they do not always seem to notice how far they can go statistically.

If we now go into the contributions which were delivered within the various disciplines we will start with those of *experimental psychology*. In one of the plenary sessions JAMES BIRREN (San Francisco) gave a paper, called "the regulation of aging and behaviour by the nervous system", while H. KAY (England) with his paper "the retrieval of information by older subjects" demonstrated the importance of the classic experiment. Furthermore four midday-sessions were dedicated to experimental psychology.

During the first session dealing with "learning, memory and performance". K.F.H. MURRELL (Cardiff) spoke about "the effect of practice of the training on reported age differences". During his research he discovered that the duration period appeared to eliminate the original differences between young and old. THAN M. BONDY (Praha) spoke about "the identifying of overlapping capital letters and age" and demonstrated therewith an original but fairly simple method.

The second session gave information about "perception and signal detection" (a.o. M. CESA BIANCHI, Italy); G.A. TALLAND (USA) and J. SZAFRAN (USA). The third session concerned psycho-physiology. A. JALAVISTO (Finland), who unfortunately died shortly before the congress started, dealt in her paper with the remarkable connection between the feeling of well-being and fluctuations in achievement with respect to a number of psycho-physiological tests.

U.J. JOVANOVIĆ (Göttingen) concluded that the older person is less able to fluctuate than the younger person. Other researchers spoke about the fact, that the physiological apparatus of older people reacts weaker than that of younger people (a.o. B.M. SHMAVONIAN *et al.*, USA); D.R. DAVIES *et al.*, England).

The fourth session was dedicated to "intellectual functioning". A. DAVIES (Liverpool) derived from comparative research the conclusion that deterioration cannot be regarded as a uni-dimensional process, but it varies in accordance to the subjects under investigation. H. NORDVIK (Oslo) expressed his doubts about the validity of the deterioration-quotient, developed by WECHSLER. S.M. CHOWN (London) mentioned results of a replication-study concerning un-timed Raven's matrices. There appeared to be interesting differences between man and woman. Finally B. BEARD (USA) could confirm the finding of the survival of adaptive intelligence with 100 years and older people in the case of tests which require instored information.

D.B. BROMLEY (Liverpool) arrived at similar conclusions with respect to the Porteus Maze Test, though he expressed his doubts concerning the usefulness of this test.

Concerning *personality and developmental psychology* particular attention was paid to "attitude towards death and the will to live". In Copenhagen this theme has not been spoken about, however in San Francisco three years earlier it had. Now R. KASTENBAUM (USA) could account of exploratory research contradict that the majority of geriatric patients appears to be in a poor mental state in the nearness of death. M. LIEBERMAN referred in his research the relationship between vulnerability and reactions to stress in

aging. In these studies he arrived at the remarkable hypothesis that the most important variables, which appear to be related to vulnerability are not similar to those psychological changes associated with impending death. Instead he discovered that distance from death is the most powerful arrangement for observing psychological changes.

J. F. JEFFERS (USA) found some evidence with respect to a connection between an evasive attitude towards death and activities, a high moral etc. J. MUNNICH (Netherlands) pointed out various methodological difficulties with respect to the term "death". In his research about the attitude towards finitude he concluded from his results that a new theoretical concept, called "a renewed engagement at a distance" should be included in the general disengagement theory. I. ROSE (USA) spoke about a relatively simple method to test death-awareness.

Finally K. TACHIBANA (Japan) informed the audience about an original research concerning the last words before dying. It can be concluded from the above mentioned research that death and finitude should be considered as a major variable and should therefore be studied in further research.

Important exploratory research was referred to by B. NEUGARTEN (Chicago) and J. BIRREN *et al.* (San Francisco) concerning psychological issues of middle age. They laid special emphasis on changes in time-perspective. Corresponding with this was a study by U. LEHR (Bonn) about expectation about and fear for the future in older and old people.

From H. THOMAE's data (Bonn) it clearly appeared in which respect the value patterns of old people undergo changes in course of later life. A. ROSSNER (Chicago) pointed out that environmental factors exert considerable influence on the self-concept of old people. In this respect D. GUTTMAN (USA) showed how worthwhile research material of so-called primitive people can be. His research has been carried out with the Mayan people.

In a *combined session with sociologists* special attention was paid to family-relationships and living patterns. Important new themes were: the emergence of the four generation family (P. TOWNSEND, England), sentiments of solidarity between older parents and children (W. E. KNOX, USA), intergenerational relations in city and country (G. STREIB, USA). More well-known themes dealt with living arrangements and health (E. SHANAS, USA), isolation and loneliness (P. PAILLAT, France; S. KORTE, England).

It struck us that only P. ROSEMAYER (Austria) pointed out the need for research of the other end of the dimension isolation versus integration in the family. Besides this he stressed the importance of the need to arrive at a developmental theory of the family.

In the field of *applied social research* the following studies deserve special mentioning: F. CLÉMENT (France) and O. W. MILLERT (USA) studied the influence of immigration or removal from the country to an urban center on life styles during old age. Another interesting research field dealt with institutional social structures, particularly with homes for the aged.

W. DONAHUE (Michigan) investigated the congruence of mixing groups of old people from different social levels. According to M. MESSER (USA) it seems better to care for old people in an old people's home (homogeneous population) than in a home for all ages.

S. PACAUD (France) carried out sociometrical and other research in old people's homes, while A. LIPMAN (Florida) arrived at the interesting conclusion that old people's need for independency in homes for the aged is based on ideological bias connected with model youth values. In this respect we should also point to research carried out by COE (USA). He found that health professionals (working in the field of aging) have a predominantly negative image of old age.

Another field that is rapidly developing at the moment is that of *industrial gerontology*. In the USA one is specially interested in adjustment to retirement. In Great-Britain however the interest is directed towards training the older worker. Though

with respect to the last mentioned interest European demonstration projects have been going on for some time, one certainly does see the limits of retraining (Belbin, England).

Apart from the research just mentioned, some interesting studies have been carried out by A. KREPS (USA) about work, work time and the increasing degree of leisure time.

Within the disciplines of *social medicine and epidemiology*—in which the discussion was opened by R. J. VAN ZONNEVELD's paper (Netherlands) in a plenary session—there are some essential problems: e.g. the need for institutional provisions for old people (H. FENNIS, Netherlands); problems in connection with the most useful classification systems (H. SHORE *et al.*, USA); periodical and preventive examination (W. T. SOWDER *et al.*, USA); the relation between retirement and health (e.g. P. W. THOMPSON, Kansas).

In this respect we also stress the importance of the studies by J. F. FREEMAN (USA) and P. BAER (USA) who could prove that in getting older relocation certainly is accompanied by damaging consequences.

To conclude, especially in the United States of America social gerontology has expanded rapidly in many directions. The disengagement theory is here—just as in Europe—the main basis. In Vienna many speakers referred to this theory, some confirmed its essential points (e.g. Rosow, USA), others added something to it (e.g. MUNNICH, Netherlands) and still others criticized it.

MADDOX (USA) emphasized that in many cases disengagement seems more a life style than a process. EVA KÖCKEIS (Austria) speaking in reference of the cross-national research on adjustment to retirement could point out that probably the quantity of family roles by old people seems more a matter of re-engagement. Whatever all this may be, it will always remain extremely difficult to account for all the different ways of behaviour in the second half of life within one single theory.

In Vienna it furthermore became clear that social gerontologists tend to display more self-confidence now in research concerning middle age. At the moment however much research cannot be anything different from observing facts as they appear.

Finally we have been surprised that so few contributions were made which touched on methodological problems as an important consideration. Insofar as social gerontology investigates particular problems one may expect that its methodology will be equally specific.

That this may be so became clear from many lectures which were concerned with “*training in gerontology*”, the first plenary session. Other speakers returned to this aspect within their own disciplines. Within the clinical sciences we may mention M. S. PATHY, Cardiff (Education in geriatric medicine), W. F. ANDERSON, Scotland (Geriatrics, a speciality?), J. GROH, CSSR (Training for research in clinical gerontology) and R. HERBEVAL, France (Enseignement clinique gérontologique).

As for social gerontology a separate session was held in this topic. Here M. E. BUNCH (Washington) spoke about “Objectives of a Ph.D. program in social gerontology”. Also KLEEMEIER's paper was heard (he died a few weeks before the congress began). His paper dealt with “training in aging as a part of speciality programs in psychology”. Furthermore R. G. KUHLEN (New York) saw the psychology of middle age and old age as an integrating part of a training program in developmental psychology, whereas R. E. KUSHNER (New York) had noticed so many different themes in adult psychology that she would advocate a separate training altogether.

For the time being KUHLEN's point of view seems most adequate at least within psychology. One need not be surprised however that this point of view is congruent with that of PATHY (Cardiff) who would like to integrate the life span in the training of future physicians. As the need for training is felt so clearly it becomes a necessity to come to an agreement about basic issues of ageing. Only sufficient insight in these basic issues may convince others of the need for training.