# HOW DO THE FIVE-SIX YEAR-OLD AGE GROUP CHILDREN DEFINE THE OLD AGE?

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of children concerning the old age. This is a qualitative research, which was conducted with the mixed research method. Pre-school institutions functioning in Karaman province that admitted to participate in the project were included into the research. 106 children, who volunteered to participate and lived with their families, were included into the sample group. Semi-structured survey form was used as the data collection tool. Descriptive statistics were used in the assessment of the quantitative data and inductive content analysis was used for the assessment of the qualitative data. Most of the participant children were 6 years old (67.9 %) and they were living in the city center (84.9 %), with their family elders (76.4 %). The "old" definitions of the children were summarized as changes in physical characteristics (graying hair, losing teeth, using the walking stick etc.), changes in the physical activities (slow walking, hearing less etc.), and other (getting closer to death etc.). According to the children, the positive characteristics of the elders are *geniality*, doing whatever they want, and being given a seat on the buses; negative aspects are their walking with difficulty, using walking sticks, having knee pains, and their death. The views of children about the elders are in a positive manner, and it was observed that the time spent with the elders and

the games played had an important influence over their definitions about the "elders". Therefore, it is suggested that the children should be met with the elders from early ages on and they should be provided more opportunity to make observations about the elders and old age.

**Key Words:** Definition, Elder, 5-6 year-old child.

## Özet

Bu çalışma, çocukların yaşlılığa yönelik algılarını belirlemek amacıyla yapıldı. Araştırma nitel araştırma türünde olup iç içe karma araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak yapıldı. Karaman İl Merkezi'nde bulunan anaokullarından izin veren kurumlar araştırma kapsamına alındı. Örneklem grubuna beş-altı yaş grubu öğrencilerden araştırmaya katılmayı kabul eden ve anne-babaları ile birlikte yaşayan 106 çocuk alındı. Veri toplama aracı olarak yarı yapılandırılmış anket formundan yararlanıldı. Nicel verilerin değerlendirilmesinde tanımlayıcı istatistikler, nitel verilerin değerlendirilmesinde tümevarımsal içerik analizi tekniği kullanıldı. Araştırmaya katılan çocukların çoğunluğu 6 yaşında (%67,9), il merkezinde (%84,9), aile büyükleri ile aynı ilde (%76,4) yaşamakta idi. Çocukların yaşlı tanımları fiziksel özelliklerdeki değişimler (saçların beyaz olması, dişlerin olmaması, baston kullanmaları vb.), fiziksel aktivitelerdeki değişimler (yavaş yürüme, kulakların duymaması vb.) ve diğer (ölmeye yakındır vb) başlıkları altında özetlendi. Çocuklara göre yaşlıların olumlu özellikleri güler yüzlü olması, istedikleri her şeyi yapabilmeleri ve otobüste onlara yer verilmesi; olumsuz yönleri zor yürümeleri, baston kullanmaları, dizlerinin ağrıması, ölmeleri olarak sıralanmakta idi. Çocukların yaşlılara bakışı genelde olumlu özelliklere sahip olup yaşlılarla geçirilen süre ve oynanan oyunların çocukların yaşlı tanımını etkilediği gözlendi. Bu nedenle; çocukların erken yaştan itibaren yaşlılar ile buluşturulmasının sağlanması ve onlara yaşlılar/yaşlılık ile ilgili daha fazla gözlem yapma fırsatının verilmesi önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tanım, Yaşlı, 5-6 yaş çocuk.

## 1. Introduction

Social and economical difficulties emerging as a result of rapid ageing of the world population influence the societies in many aspects. Ageing, in social terms, causes changes in issues such as health, social security, environment, education, job opportunities, socio-cultural activities, and family life. This fact brings to the agenda the need to understand what the ageing means, how it is expressed, and how it is experienced (Abrams et al., 2015).

In line with the increasing elderly population of the world, the number of the elders increases in our country as well. The World Health Organization defines the "elderly" as the age of 65 and over, while the "very old" age is determined to be 85 and over (WHO,2016; Türkbeyler et al., 2018). According to the data of Turkish Statistical Institute, there are 7 million 65 year-old and over people living in Turkey, who are to be included into the "very old" category of the society (TUIK, 2016).

Today, the position of old individuals within the family is changing due to many sociological factors such as the changing structure of family. This change weakens the intergeneration relations and solidarity. Ageing is perceived by the society and individuals as a threat rather than a success. Even worse, the increasing old population is perceived as a burden on the shoulders of the young population (Swift et al., 2017).

Decreasing the social equality and welfare, the negative attitudes concerning the old age cause inequality and social exclusion. This attitude not only becomes an obstacle for the complete inclusion and participation of the elderly in the society, but also it can prevent us from understanding the ageing process. Moreover, this perspective can cause reinforcement of this view in the minds of the elderly and development of harmful types of behaviors for themselves (Abrams et al., 2015; Pekesen, 2020).

Old individuals expect a special interest from their children and grandchildren within the Turkish family pattern (Arpacı & Şahin Tezel, 2015). In our society, the time spent with the grandchildren, loving them, playing with them, and receiving help when needed are pleasing experiences (Arpacı & Bekar, 2013). In a study conducted by Viguer et al., (2013), it was determined that the grandchildren met with their grandparents and involved in cultural activities at certain times in a week. In the study conducted in the rural areas of New Zealand by Keeling (2012), the views of 11-13-year-old age group were examined. In this study, Keeling determined that the children met with their grandparents everyday or once a week, one third of them

regularly involved in activities, and one fifth of them had a special relation with a grandparent. In another study on a relevant field conducted abroad, it is reported that some children state the old age as freedom (Devine & Carney, 2015).

Bringing together the elderly with the society has become increasingly important. Establishing a positive bond between the children and the elderly is important for the both groups. Old grandparents that have communication with their grandchild(ren) can convey their cultures to the third generation (Bahar et al., 2009). Moreover, it has an important place for the children to have interaction with their grandparents, observe different physical characteristics and different behaviors of the individuals in different age groups (Demiriz & Arpacı, 2016). Various activities are organized in our country for the children to develop more positive perceptions and behaviors for the elderly. While the meeting of children and elderly is provided in these activities, the perception levels of the children concerning the elderly is not considered much (Murakami, 2017).

The policies to be developed for the old age are not only for the elderly. Old age policies should provide opportunities for the families and existing young generations as well. Thus, societies developing old age policies will also design the future of their individuals, producing a quality living and ageing for them (Arun, 2008).

Although there are studies in the literature conducted on the elderly perceptions of the children, the studies on pre-school children are not in a sufficient level. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the perceptions of the preschool children concerning the old age and their communication levels with their grandparents.

## 2. Material and Methods

### 2.1. Study design and participants

The research is a qualitative study which was conducted with mixed research method. Both cross-sectional and qualitative research methods were used. The data were collected from the children complying with the research criteria (accepting to participate in the study, being in the 5-6 age group, living with their parents, and being students at certain preschools) and attending in the preschools that institutional permissions were gained for, in the Karaman Provincial Center between 1 October and 1 December 2018. There are 11 public and 7 private preschools in Karaman Province. The principals of each preschool were interviewed and the institutions permitting for the study were included in the research. Since an in-depth interview is conducted

with the participants in the qualitative research studies, the number of the participants may change according to the repetition of the data. The researcher continues sampling until finding the pieces of information and proofs. When the satisfaction point is reached for the data, in other words, when the repetition of the data starts, the data collection process ends (Erdoğan, k 2015). Under the light of this information, 106 children were reached at the end of the data collection process.

## 2.2. Data collection tools

The semi-structured survey form was used as the data collection tool in this study. The survey form, which was prepared in line with the literature, was comprised of 31 questions and 2 parts. In the first part were the questions about demographical characteristics of the participants (age, educational status, and vocations of their parents), and in the second part were the interview questions concerning their ageing perceptions (positive-negative aspects of the old age, and their expression of the old age).

## 2.3. Collecting data

Before the research study was conducted, the researchers received training from the experts with qualitative research experience. The institutions were visited in the pre-arranged dates. Verbal consents were gained from the children and their parents, who wanted to participate in the study. The data were collected in approximately 20 minutes with face-to-face interview method under the supervision of the teachers. The researcher recorded the answers of the children without providing a guidance or manipulations.

## 2.4. Analyses

The data obtained from the research were evaluated by means of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)-21.00 programme. Descriptive statistics (number and percentage) were used in the evaluation of the qualitative data. In the analysis of the interview questions, inductive content analysis method was used. The data was read several times with line-by-line reading method for the data analysis, and thematic coding was implemented, after which the codes were classified by the researcher. Categories and themes were created through similar codes.

*2.5. Ethics approval*

In order to conduct this research study, the Ethical Committee Approval (numbered 08-2018/23) was gained from Non-Invasive Ethics Committee. Moreover, written and verbal consents of the participants were been received after providing a preliminary briefing for them during the data collection period.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows distribution of the demographical characteristics of the children. The majority of the participant students were 6 years old (67.9%), female (51.9%), living in city center (84.9%), and living together with their parents and siblings (73.6%). Although the duration of their participation in the preschools varied, half of the children mentioned that they had been participating in the preschools for 6-12 months. It was determined that 31.1 % of the mothers were graduates of secondary school, while 25.5% of them were graduates of high school or higher education, and 78.3% were housewives. It was also detected that the highest rates of fathers were graduates of high school (36.8%) and graduate level or over (29.2%), while 34.9% were self-employed and 30.2% were workers. The income levels of most of the families (75.5%) were detected at "income-expense-equal" level.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the demographical characteristics of the children

| Demographical Characteristics | Number (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Age | | |
|    5 years old | 34 | 32.1 |
|    6 years old | 72 | 67.9 |
| Gender | | |
|    Female | 55 | 51.9 |
|    Male | 51 | 48.1 |
| Living in | | |
|    Provincial center | 90 | 84.9 |
|    District/Village | 16 | 15.1 |
| Number of Siblings | | |
|    No | 12 | 11.2 |
|    1 sibling | 45 | 42.5 |
|    2 siblings | 27 | 25.5 |
|    3 and over siblings | 22 | 20.8 |
| Individuals that they live together in the house | | |
|    Mother-father-siblings | 78 | 73.6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mother-father-siblings-relative | 16 | 15.1 |
| Other (single parent) | 12 | 11.2 |
| Duration of participation in the preschool | | |
| 1-6 months | 22 | 20.8 |
| 6-12 months | 53 | 50 |
| 12-24 months | 23 | 21.7 |
| 24 months and over | 8 | 7.5 |

**Table 2:** Distribution of the children according to their relations with the grandparents

| | Number (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Living in the same city | | |
| Yes | 81 | 76.4 |
| No | 25 | 23.6 |
| Meeting frequency | | |
| Everyday | 31 | 29.2 |
| 1-2 times a week | 39 | 36.8 |
| 1-2 times a month | 22 | 20.8 |
| Several times a year | 14 | 13.2 |
| Time spent together | | |
| 3-4 hours | 18 | 16.9 |
| 5-6 hours | 20 | 18.9 |
| 7 hours and over | 68 | 64.2 |
| Activities conducted together | | |
| Going to the playground | 38 | 35.8 |
| Drawing a picture | 15 | 14.2 |
| Playing games | 69 | 65.1 |
| Other (walking, cooking, cleaning etc.) | 35 | 32.3 |
| Grandparents getting tired during the activities | | |
| Yes | 90 | 84.9 |
| No | 16 | 15.1 |
| Activities difficult for them | | |
| Running | 39 | 36.8 |
| Going to the playground | 36 | 34.0 |
| Playing games | 32 | 30.2 |
| Other (walking, cooking, cleaning etc.) | 17 | 14.4 |

Table 2 shows distribution of the children according to their relations with the grandparents. It was determined that 76.4% of the children were living in the same city with their grandparents and 29.2% of them were meeting with them every day. Majority of the children mentioned that they spent 7 hours or more with their grandparents each day. The most frequent two activities performed with the grandparents were playing games (65.1%) and going to

playgrounds (35.8%). Majority of the children mentioned that their grandparents were getting tired during the activities (84.9%) and that the most difficult activity for them was running.

In Figure 1, it is observed that children generally pay attention to the physical features of the elderly and to the changes in their physical activities. When the children were asked to give examples from their family or affiliated elderly (who came to mind), not all of them gave information to their grandparents, other elders.When the happiest moments with them were asked, some of them (Ç1, Ç2, Ç4, Ç5, Ç8, Ç11, Ç15, Ç17, Ç18, Ç21, Ç22, Ç23, Ç26, Ç27, Ç30, Ç46-48, Ç65-67) mentioned that they were the happiest when they were together with their grandparents, while some others (Ç3, Ç6, Ç7, Ç9, Ç12, Ç14, Ç16, Ç19, Ç24, Ç25, Ç28, Ç29, Ç31-38, Ç49, Ç50, Ç61-64, Ç68-71, Ç72-76, Ç92, Ç99, Ç106) were the happiest when they were playing games, or (Ç10, Ç13, Ç20, Ç39-45, Ç52-60, Ç77-83, Ç95, Ç98) when the grandparents bought toys for them. The children that defined the happiest moments as playing times summarized their thoughts as such; "We play with ball each time we meet with my grandpa. This makes me so happy" (Ç3). Another child (Ç7) expressed the happiest moments as such; "I love helping my grandma while she is cooking". Another child (Ç14) mentioned; "When I joke, they assume it as real, they become so funny".  A child, who mentioned to be having fun while playing, expressed that; "We were sitting on the playground with my grandma, the watering tool suddenly opened and we were wet. It was so funny".
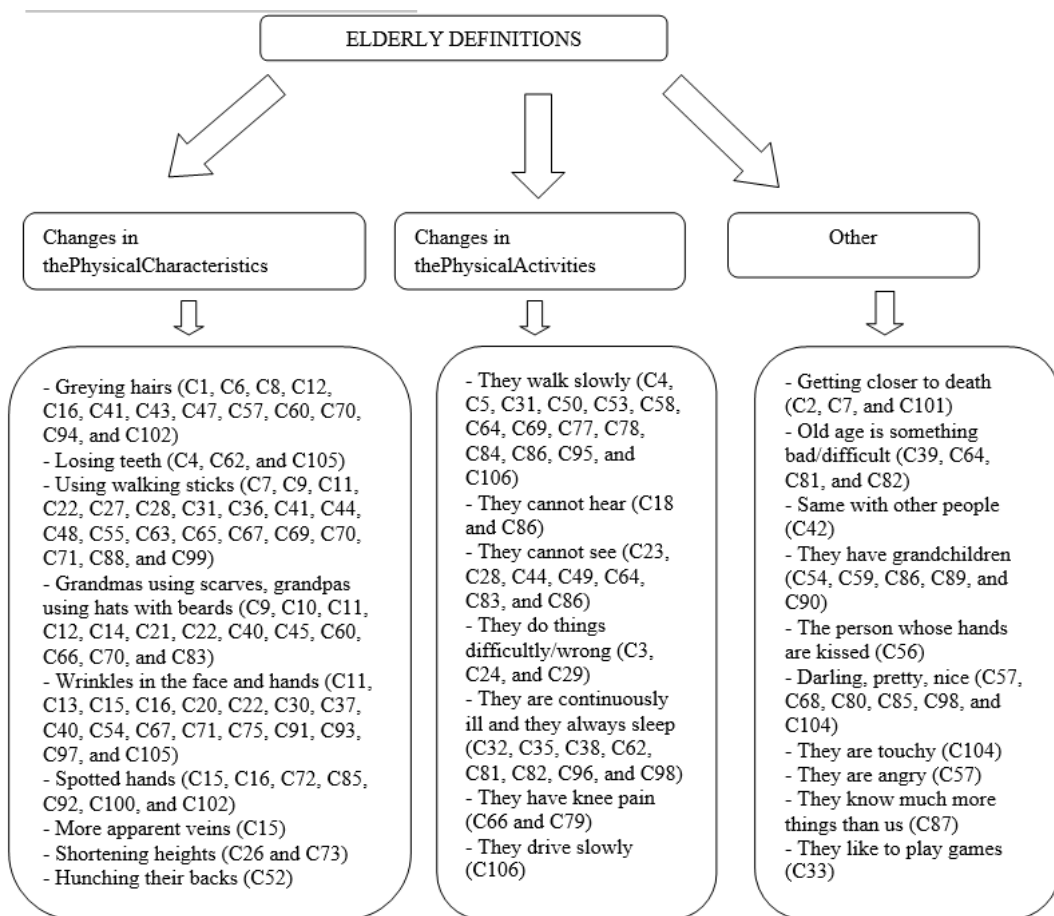
ELDERLY DEFINITIONS

**Changes in thePhysicalCharacteristics**

- Greying hairs (C1, C6, C8, C12, C16, C41, C43, C47, C57, C60, C70, C94, and C102)
- Losing teeth (C4, C62, and C105)
- Using walking sticks (C7, C9, C11, C22, C27, C28, C31, C36, C41, C44, C48, C55, C63, C65, C67, C69, C70, C71, C88, and C99)
- Grandmas using scarves, grandpas using hats with beards (C9, C10, C11, C12, C14, C21, C22, C40, C45, C60, C66, C70, and C83)
- Wrinkles in the face and hands (C11, C13, C15, C16, C20, C22, C30, C37, C40, C54, C67, C71, C75, C91, C93, C97, and C105)
- Spotted hands (C15, C16, C72, C85, C92, C100, and C102)
- More apparent veins (C15)
- Shortening heights (C26 and C73)
- Hunching their backs (C52)

**Changes in thePhysicalActivities**

- They walk slowly (C4, C5, C31, C50, C53, C58, C64, C69, C77, C78, C84, C86, C95, and C106)
- They cannot hear (C18 and C86)
- They cannot see (C23, C28, C44, C49, C64, C83, and C86)
- They do things difficultly/wrong (C3, C24, and C29)
- They are continuously ill and they always sleep (C32, C35, C38, C62, C81, C82, C96, and C98)
- They have knee pain (C66 and C79)
- They drive slowly (C106)

**Other**

- Getting closer to death (C2, C7, and C101)
- Old age is something bad/difficult (C39, C64, C81, and C82)
- Same with other people (C42)
- They have grandchildren (C54, C59, C86, C89, and C90)
- The person whose hands are kissed (C56)
- Darling, pretty, nice (C57, C68, C80, C85, C98, and C104)
- They are touchy (C104)
- They are angry (C57)
- They know much more things than us (C87)
- They like to play games (C33)

**Figure 1:** Elderly definitions of the children

Table 3 shows positive aspects of old age according to the children. According to the answers of the children, the positive characteristics of the elderly were discussed under five headings. Accordingly, the most conspicuous physical characteristics of the elderly was their *geniality*. Socially, the most expressed positive aspects of the old age mentioned by the children were *they do whatever they like* and *they are given a seat on the bus*. Moreover, some positive characteristics were also mentioned like *they know everything*, *they do not go to work*, *they do not need to go to school and do homework*; however, there were some children who mentioned that *old age is not something good*.

**Table 3:** Positive aspects of old age according to the children

| Physically | Socially | Spiritually-Mentally | Economically | There is no positive aspects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| - They are genial (C9, C10, C11, C19, C20, C23, C33, C38, C54, C105, C106)<br>- They have fat cheeks (C29, C51, C55, C73, C74)<br>- Their hairs are more beautiful (C40, C100)<br>- They speak nice (C4, C25) | - They love children (C89, C90, C91, C92, C93, C104)<br>- They give candies (C2, C16, C26, C37, C42, C43, C75, C78, C79, C81, C97)<br>- They wander a lot, they do whatever they like (C3, C5, C17, C30, C36, C39, C44, C45, C48, C49, C57, C59, C60, C62, C82, C96, C98)<br>- They do not attend schools (C32, C62, 76)<br>- They are given a seat on the bus (C6, C13, C14, C21, C22, C28, C35, C41, C42, C46, C47, C50, C52, C53, C56, C58, C63, C64, C65, C67, C69, C70, C72, C99) | - They know everything (C85, C87)<br>- They will go to heaven after death (C34, C68) | - They do not go to work (C66, C80, C94, C95, C101) | - It is not something good (C1, C7, C12, C15, C18, C24, C27, C31, C61, C71, C83, C84, C86, C102, C103) |

The negative aspects of the old age according to the children were answered in two parts; physically (n=80): *walking with difficulty*, *using walking sticks*, *having knee pain*, *being ill*, and spiritually (n=26): *their death*.

In this study, which was conducted to determine the perceptions of the children about the old age and their perspectives towards the grandparents, it was determined that the children explained the old age concept in three different categories as the changes in the physical characteristics (graying hairs, loosing teeth etc.), changes in the physical activities (walking slowly, loss of function in sense organs etc.), and others (close to death, it is something bad etc.). In a study conducted by Goriup and Lahe (2018), it was determined that the definitions of young participants concerning the old age were loss of sense organs, slower activities, and dotage. In the study conducted by Sum et al., (2016) the old age was defined by the participants with positive

descriptions such as creativity and happiness. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), old age is a biological process, which is not under the control of the human being and which has its own dynamics process (WHO, 2018). According to this, the descriptions of the participant students of this study were similar to the literature.

In our study, children mentioned that old age had both positive and negative characteristics. The positive characteristics were classified into five groups and *geniality*, *not going to work*, and *being given a seat on the bus* were the most emphasized aspects. They discussed the negative aspects of old age in physical and mental means.

The literature reveals different results because of whether stereotypes and attitudes existed in the elderly in childhood. In some studies, it is argued that negative stereotypes and attitudes towards the elderly do not exist in childhood. Some studies reveal that negative aging stereotypes can be found in children and adolescents before the age of 6 (Flamion et al., 2019). In a study by Aşiret et al., (2017) conducted on young people, both positive and negative aspects of old age were determined. In the study of Forghani and Neustaedter (2014), the negative characteristics of grandparents were determined to be *intervening in their affairs too much* and *speaking too much*. In their study, Arpacı and Bekar (2013) concluded that the children in small age groups had more positive views concerning the elderly. It is known that various factors such as elderly perspectives of mother and father, divorce status of the parents, and particularly the individual and social characteristics were effective in positive or negative opinions of children concerning the elderly. Moreover, some other factors such as the educational status of the grandparents, and their living in the same city with the grandchild(ren) are needed to be considered as well (Yoon et al., 2017). Our study fulfilled all of these requirements, and it was observed that the positive perceptions about elderly were more intense.

Among the children, 29.2 % stated that they met with their grandparents every day, while majority mentioned that they spent 7 hours or more with their grandparents each day. In a study conducted on children by Oliviera et al., (2015) it was determined that the children daily spent 5 hours or more with their grandparents, and vast majority of them were determined to be living with their grandparents. In the study of Petkova (2015), it was concluded that children living closer to their grandparents had a more frequent communication with them and their relations were more hearty. Considering the fact that the participant students have frequent meetings with their grandparents, it can be mentioned that their grandparent-grandchildren relations were better.

Grandparents involve in some activities (playing games, watching TV, going to picnics etc.) with their grandchildren (The British Psychological Society, 2005). Similarly, in this study, it was determined that the grandparents involved in many activities with their grandchildren such as going to the playground, drawing pictures, and particularly playing games. In a study conducted by Viguer et al., (2013) the most preferred activities were determined to be looking after them, mentioning about their experiences, and telling stories. It is considered that involving in some activities and experiencing sharing during these activities with the grandparents, the grandchildren will increase their life experiences.

In our study, the majority of the children mentioned that their grandparents were getting tired during the activities (84,9%), and the most difficult activity for them was running. An individual becomes a grandparent at an age of 45 on average and after this age, they experience certain illnesses. Particularly the chronic diseases directly influence the frequency, volume, and duration of the activities. Accordingly, this observation of the children is supported by the literature.

Despite the illnesses, a positive establishment of grandparent-grandchild relation significantly influences the life satisfaction levels of them and the grandchildren (Vidouje et al., 2018). Hugging the child and showing interest to them, going out for a walk together, and giving them gifts, grandparents make the grandchildren feel happier. Children feel disappointed when they stay apart from their grandparents, when they get angry with them, and when the grandparents show interest in other things (Demiriz & Arpacı, 2016). Similar results were reached in this study as well.

This study has some limitations. Interviews with children on certain questions and there are deficiencies in the scope of the questions. Moreover, the results obtained from the study do not reflect the universe.

## 4. Conclusion

In this study, it was mainly concluded that,

- the elderly definitions of the children can be classified into three categories (change in the physical characteristics, change in the physical activities, and others)
- the children are aware of both the positive and negative aspects of old age, and their perceptions were rather positive,

- in accordance with the previous determination, the children evaluate the old age in a positive manner,

- the most important reason of this evaluation might be to be closer to the grandparents and to spend more time with them,

- the children had a great time with their grandparents and involve in some activities such as going to the playground, drawing pictures, and particularly playing games.

Old age is a process that exhibits a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience. The integration of young age groups with the elderly is very important in terms of knowledge and experience transfer and creating a positive perception of the elderly in children. For this reason, it is recommended to organize old age education programs in order to strengthen communication between generations and to create a perception of the elderly regardless of age.

**Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest relevant to this article.

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