



LONELY OLD AGE IN SOCIAL GOVERNANCE: THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIO-GERONTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Lobar Eryigitova

CAMU International Medical University, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Sociology

Abstract. This article presents reflections on lonely old age within the system of social governance and the socio-gerontological analysis of working with the elderly, focusing on its theoretical and methodological foundations. In particular, the factors influencing the lives of elderly individuals in the modern era are examined through the perspectives and approaches of classical sociological theories.

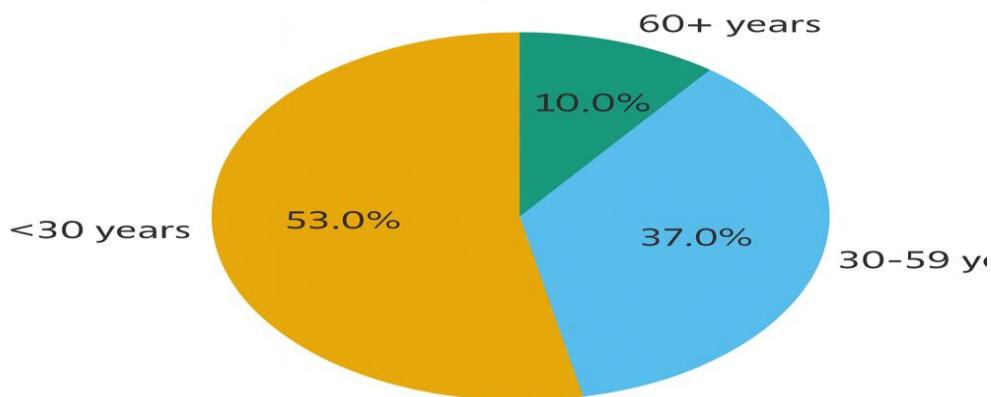
Keywords: demographic approaches, condition of loneliness, transformations within the family, participation of the elderly in social life, function of social life integration.

INTRODUCTION.

In the 21st century, as a result of demographic changes, urbanization processes, population migration, and transformations within the family structure, the social status and role of the elderly in society have undergone significant transformation. The decreasing participation of older adults in social life, the intensification of loneliness, the rise of social isolation, and increasing levels of psychological distress have today become an urgent field of study not only for psychology and demography, but also for sociology. This issue is equally important in Uzbek society and represents one of the pressing topics requiring comprehensive and serious research.

According to official data for 2024, individuals aged 60 and above constitute approximately 10.5% of the total population of the country. Statistical reports show that in 2020, when the population of Uzbekistan reached 34 million people, the share of those aged 60 and above was 2.7 million, accounting for 7.8% of the population. In 2022, this figure reached 8.5% out of a total population of 36 million, and in 2024, it reached 10.5% of 38 million. (Diagram No. 1)

Diagram 1. Age Distribution of the Population (2024)



Thus, the global trend of an increasing proportion of elderly people in the population – one of the major issues of the modern world – is also being observed in our country. Ongoing reforms in the healthcare system devote special attention to this important demographic challenge. In particular, this is reflected in the social services provided to elderly individuals living alone. A certain part of them live in conditions of loneliness or require assistance. This situation necessitates a reconsideration of the effectiveness of social governance systems, social support programs for the elderly, and priority tasks within state policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY.

The renowned classical sociologist É. Durkheim, in his work *“The Division of Labor in Society,”* emphasized that the stability of society is determined by the level of social integration. He writes: *“If society does not embrace the individual, the individual’s spirit becomes fragmented; without society, a person cannot attain moral stability.”* Based on these ideas, the issue of lonely elderly individuals should not be viewed merely as a personal or family matter, but rather examined from the perspective of the social system’s integrative function [1].

Similarly, in T. Parsons’ work *“The Social System”*, it is noted that the stability of society depends on four functions: adaptation, integration, goal attainment, and legitimacy [2]. If an elderly person loses their social role or becomes excluded from social life, this indicates weakened integration. Therefore, the social governance system must aim to restore the social activity of the elderly, utilize their knowledge and experience, and support them as active subjects within social policy.

In the context of Uzbekistan, this task is reflected in the measures being implemented within the framework of the “National Strategy for Social Protection of Citizens (2025–2030)” and the “Elderly Support Program.” However, practical experience shows that many elderly individuals living alone are still unable to fully benefit from social services. This indicates the need to reconsider the social governance system from a socio-gerontological perspective. Based on the ideas highlighted above, we can state that within the scope of our research, we



have attempted to establish a methodological foundation for developing the socio-gerontological analysis of the issue of lonely old age in social governance.

First, it is necessary to focus on the importance of socio-gerontological approaches in social governance. Socio-gerontology is a discipline that analyzes social processes experienced during the later stages of human life, the role of older individuals in society, and the system of social relations surrounding them. At its core lie questions of social activity, social roles, and the acceptance of the elderly by society. From this point of view, the phenomenon of lonely old age should not be regarded merely as a biological or personal condition, but as a reflection of the social system itself.

As sociologists P. Berger and T. Luckmann emphasize in their well-known 1966 work *“The Social Construction of Reality,”* all types of reality are socially reconstructed through the interactions between individuals. Therefore, loneliness is not simply a natural condition; rather, it is a form of social reality that emerges as a result of decreasing social relationships. The weakening of social ties among older people distances them from the broader “system of interpersonal relations,” which constitutes a major indicator of social isolation [3].

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS.

Historically, respect for the elderly has always been highly valued in Uzbekistan. From ancient times, within our mentality, lifestyle, customs, and traditions, honoring older individuals, showing them respect, seeking their advice, and relying on their life experience have been essential elements guiding the behavior and activity of younger generations. However, in today’s rapidly globalizing world, factors such as urbanization, migration, and new forms of economic relations have begun to influence the structural composition of these traditional relationships. For example, the number of elderly individuals actively participating in neighborhood (mahalla) communities has decreased in recent years, which indicates a decline in their involvement in social governance.

Moreover, socio-gerontological analyses show that the participation of older people in social life is not merely a matter of moral or family responsibility; it is also an indicator that determines the effectiveness of social policy. Society must strive to utilize the knowledge and experience of the older generation as valuable resources in social governance [4].

In this regard, it is appropriate to refer to the view of the sociologist Max Weber, who, in his work *Economy and Society*, emphasizes that every social system requires rational governance, meaning that maintaining the social activity of each group is essential for the stability of society. According to his conclusion, excluding elderly individuals from governance processes may lead to the disruption of “sociological equilibrium” within society.

In the context of Uzbekistan, this situation is particularly visible in urban environments. Many elderly individuals living alone require not only material support but also spiritual and emotional assistance. Therefore, implementing a socio-gerontological approach within the local governance system and social service activities is considered a critical task. This approach helps to view the older generation as active subjects of the social system, to reshape their social roles, and to strengthen a “human-centered governance model” within society.

Within the scope of this study, conducting a socio-gerontological analysis is of great importance. It is necessary to identify the main purpose of such an analysis as both a theoretical and practical foundation.

In our research in this direction, the primary task of socio-gerontological analysis is to reassess the role of the elderly in social life, to activate their participation in the system of social



Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science

Volume 3, Issue 11 November 2025

<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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relations, and to recognize them as active subjects within the system of societal values. The methodological basis of this process traces back to classical sociological theories. In particular, the sociologist É. Durkheim, in his scientific and theoretical studies, defined society as “a system of interconnected and mutually responsible individuals.” According to him, “when an individual loses their role as a link in social life, this indicates a lack of moral cohesion in society.” In our view, this perspective of the classical sociologist serves as an important scientific foundation for understanding the issue of elderly loneliness. Indeed, as social ties weaken in society, the likelihood of loneliness among the elderly increases, which, in turn, affects overall social balance [5].

In modern sociology, old age is viewed not merely as a biological indicator of age but as a “social status and state of activity.” According to T. Parsons’ functionalist theory, for any social system to remain stable, each member must perform their function. If the social functions of the elderly are lost, a “gap in adaptation and integration” emerges within the system [2].

P. Berger refers to this situation as a “loss of social reality.” He emphasizes that when social connections and symbols that sustain human activity weaken, the individual’s self-understanding also diminishes. Consequently, a lonely elderly person experiences not only physical but also spiritual isolation [3].

In the context of Uzbekistan, these theoretical ideas also have practical significance. In national culture, the elderly have traditionally been regarded as a moral pillar of society. However, as a result of globalization and urbanization, changes are occurring within the traditional system of values. In some cases, the advice or experience of the elderly is not sufficiently appreciated. This leads to a decrease in the level of social integration and an expansion of social isolation [5].

Therefore, Uzbekistan’s social governance system needs to implement the concept of “active aging” while taking into account the needs of the elderly. This concept was also emphasized in the UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002, which identifies ensuring the economic, social, and cultural activity of older persons as a priority of state policy.

Socio-gerontological analysis serves as a scientific basis in this process, as it evaluates the quality of life of the elderly not only through economic indicators but also through social connections, participation in governance, and the system of moral values. Studying methodological approaches to the position of lonely elderly people in Uzbekistan’s social governance system is currently one of the most important topics attracting sociologists’ attention [5].

In Uzbek society, the issue of elderly loneliness is one of the pressing directions of social governance. State and public institutions implement various programs to support the elderly, involve them in socially active life, and create a healthy environment for aging. However, in this process, the psycho-emotional needs of lonely elderly people, disruptions in social relationships, and states of social isolation require thorough scientific analysis.

From a socio-gerontological perspective, the situation of lonely elderly people within the social governance system can be addressed not only through economic or everyday assistance but also by enhancing their level of social integration and ensuring their inclusion in the moral and cultural environment. É. Durkheim, in his work *The Division of Labor in Society*, emphasized that the stability of society depends on the mutual solidarity of its citizens. From this viewpoint, activating the participation of lonely elderly individuals in the social governance system contributes to increasing the overall level of social cohesion in society [4].



In the context of Uzbekistan, this issue reached a new stage within the framework of the “Year of Honoring the Elderly” program announced in 2015. In particular, the practice of studying the social needs of the elderly and maintaining regular communication with lonely elderly people was introduced within the “Mahalla-based work” system. This approach allowed the collection of sociological data at the grassroots level and its use in decision-making. However, past experience has shown that these activities were still insufficient.

Consequently, in subsequent years, a number of practical measures addressing this issue have been implemented within key strategic state programs. For instance, the 2017 “Action Strategy” set and implemented several goals aimed at ensuring a dignified standard of living for the elderly. Likewise, the Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022–2026 includes a number of measures focused on providing attention and care to elderly population groups and ensuring their social protection, which is certainly encouraging [5].

At the same time, a systematic methodological approach is necessary to address the problem of lonely elderly individuals. That is, socio-gerontological analysis should study demographic changes, cultural values, and shifts in family relationships together. Such an approach not only identifies the problem but also sets the task of developing a social governance model to resolve it.

According to T. Parsons’ functionalist theory, for any social system to maintain stability, it must fulfill four functions: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latent pattern maintenance. On this basis, the system for working with the elderly should also be managed through these functions. For example, the “integration” function ensures that lonely elderly individuals are reintegrated into society through interaction within the mahalla, community, and intergenerational communication. This serves as a scientific and practical foundation in socio-gerontological analysis, as it allows analysis not only from a theoretical perspective but also in connection with practical measures implemented in the context of Uzbekistan [2].

There are methodological principles for ensuring the social integration of lonely elderly individuals. In the social governance system, their integration is considered one of the key criteria for ensuring social stability. As classic sociologists have emphasized, society is stabilized not only through economic relations but also through moral cohesion and social unity. É. Durkheim wrote on this point: “When an individual’s connection with society is broken, a void arises in their spiritual life, and this void is filled with loneliness and moral anguish.”

From this perspective, integrating lonely elderly people should be viewed not only as a task of social policy but also as a factor that ensures the moral health of society.

In Uzbekistan, social processes associated with population aging and the increase in the number of lonely elderly individuals require new governance approaches. According to 2024 statistical data, nearly 10 percent of the country’s population is over 60 years old, and a significant portion of them live alone. This situation poses a risk of increasing social isolation and emotional disconnection in society. In such circumstances, the methodological principles for scientific analysis are shaped in the following directions:

Principle of an Integrative Approach. According to this principle, the problems of lonely elderly individuals should be addressed not only from the perspective of social assistance or medical services but also through cultural, psychological, and community relations systems. As G. H. Mead emphasized in his theory of *symbolic interactionism*: “A



Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science

Volume 3, Issue 11 November 2025

<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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person understands their ‘self’ only through relations with others.” This idea underlines the importance of communication and community engagement in restoring the social activity of lonely elderly people.

Principle of Considering the Cultural Context. In Uzbekistan, family values and the mahalla institution play a central social role in the lives of the elderly. Therefore, integrating lonely elderly individuals into social governance in harmony with mahalla activities is a crucial social task. The ideas presented in P. Berger and T. Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* are relevant here: “Every social reality is constructed by humans through social interaction.” Thus, the exclusion of lonely elderly individuals from social reality is linked to their disengagement from the process of “social construction.”

Principle of Social Partnership. Working with lonely elderly people through the collaboration of state, public organizations, and the mahalla system represents a modern direction in social governance. In this process, alongside state programs, it is important to involve volunteers, students, and youth actively [5].

From a methodological perspective, these principles make it possible to study the problems of lonely elderly individuals systematically and to define their role in social governance. They function as a synthesis of social integration theory, functionalism, and phenomenology. This scientific approach allows for a reevaluation of lonely elderly individuals in the context of Uzbekistan not merely as a “group in need of social assistance” but as “active subjects of social life.”

There are methodological principles for ensuring the social integration of lonely elderly individuals. In modern society, the issue of their social integration is one of the pressing directions in sociology. Social integration refers to the process through which an individual fully participates in social life, actively engages in social relations, and perceives themselves as a member of the community. As É. Durkheim emphasized, the stability of society and the mental well-being of individuals largely depend on the degree of social connectedness. From this perspective, ensuring the social integration of lonely elderly individuals represents a practical expression of the principles of social justice and humanism [4].

Regarding methodological foundations, several approaches are particularly important for analyzing the social integration of lonely elderly people.

Systems Approach: According to this approach, an elderly person is considered an integral element of the social system. In line with T. Parsons’ *social system theory*, each individual performs a specific function in society. The social integration of lonely elderly individuals is ensured through their interaction with societal institutions – family, mahalla, medical services, and social services [2].

Interactionist Approach: As J. G. Mead and H. Blumer emphasized, social integration is formed not only through external institutions but also through interpersonal relationships. In ensuring the integration of lonely elderly individuals, it is important to create an environment for active communication, community events, and support at the mahalla level. This aligns with the meaning-making and personal experience focus of *symbolic interactionism*.

Humanistic and Existential Approach: According to A. Schutz and P. Berger, an individual’s position in society is defined by their personal experience and their “subjective perception of social reality.” In the integration of lonely elderly individuals, it is important to value their life experience, create an environment for meaningful conversation, and regard them as active subjects [3].



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ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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Ethnosociological Approach. This approach emphasizes that in Uzbek society, the mahalla institution and traditional customs define the social value of the elderly. Therefore, in integrating lonely elderly individuals, the leading methodological principles based on national cultural values are respect, compassion, and communal responsibility. The main methodological principles can be outlined as follows:

Principle of Inclusivity – viewing every elderly citizen as an active member of society and involving them in social activities.

Principle of Social Justice – ensuring that the legal, economic, and cultural needs of lonely elderly individuals are met on an equal basis.

Principle of Cultural Contextuality – developing integration programs that take national and local traditions into account.

Principle of Partnership – ensuring social integration through collaboration among the state, non-governmental organizations, mahallas, and the broader community.

Principle of Targeted Individualization – providing support based on the specific needs, mental state, and health of each lonely elderly person.

In practical application, a number of activities have been implemented in Uzbekistan based on these principles. In 2023, the *National Program for Supporting the Elderly* was adopted, implementing comprehensive measures for the social integration of lonely elderly individuals through the mahalla system. Through “social partnership,” mahalla activists, NGOs, and medical centers support the active lifestyle of the elderly. In this process, scientific monitoring systems such as “interactive communication centers” and the “Quality of Life Index” have been established, with significant contributions from the Institute of Social Research.

CONCLUSION.

The methodology for ensuring the social integration of lonely elderly individuals should be systematic, multi-level, and human-centered. This process not only represents state policy but also strengthens social cohesion at the community, mahalla, and family levels. As Durkheim emphasized, social cohesion ensures the stability of society. Therefore, integrating lonely elderly individuals is not only a social task but also a moral duty.

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