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## **'Unknown intelligent' The social and emotional needs of gifted elders**

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### Abstract

Commissioned by the Instituut Hoogbegaafdheid Volwassenen (IHBV, Gifted Adults Foundation) a descriptive study was done on the social and emotional needs of gifted elderly in the Netherlands. The IHBV has found that there is hardly any literature on this group to be found and that there are gifted elderly who do not live up to their full potential in society. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide advice to the IHBV on how to respond to the needs of gifted elderly in the Netherlands so they can flourish in society. To map out these needs, use was made of available literature, interviews and a digital questionnaire. The sample consisted of members of Mensa in the Netherlands (Mensa is an international organization for highly intelligent people), with an age of sixty years and over. The participants were indirectly contacted through messages in the LinkedIn group and via a monthly group mail from Mensa.

The literature showed that participation in society, self-development and social network are important social- and emotional factors for gifted elderly. These issues are therefore included in the survey. Before conducting this survey, it was verified by doing interviews with five gifted elderly. These interviews showed that gifted elderly have a strong need for acquiring knowledge. In addition they do not always connect with peers and sometimes run into incomprehension from society. These findings are therefore included in the survey to make it more suitable to the target audience.

In order to map the social- and emotional needs of gifted elderly in the Netherlands, a national survey was spread and analyzed. A total of 100 respondents completed the survey. The majority indicated that they are satisfied with their own voluntary contributions to society. In addition, a majority also feels that they could do more for society. It is also notable that 86% of the gifted seniors want to develop themselves in various areas and that a large majority has a need for acquiring more knowledge. The majority of the gifted elderly seem to experience a moderate loneliness. These findings showed no differences between men and women.

To conclude, it seems that gifted elderly have a desire to be of more use for society. They are satisfied with their own voluntary contributions to society but feel that they could contribute more. In addition it has been shown that gifted elderly have a great need for self-development. This need for self-development is reflected in a wide range of areas. Finally, it can be concluded that gifted elderly experience a discrepancy between what they want from interpersonal relationships and what they experience in this area.

It is recommended to spread information about gifted elderly so awareness and understanding of the target audience in society will expand. Self-development within nursing homes should be encouraged. There should also be more study opportunities for gifted elderly, like offering courses that are appropriate to their intellectual level. Finally, there should be more opportunities to make use of the skills and knowledge of the gifted elderly could. In further elaboration of these recommendations an appeal could possibly be made on gifted elderly and/or Applied Psychology students.

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