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Aging and Dying in Croatian Rural Community at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century

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Aim. To investigate how pervasively the culture patterns of community determined the people's response to the phenomena of aging and dying, as well as to obtain an insight into the social, psychological and medical dimension of these phenomena, applying the data related to the Croats living in the Croatian rural environment at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Methods. This study is based on the materials published in a series Collection of Works on the Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs (*Zbornik za narodni zivot i obicaje juznih Slavena*), considered a source material for anthropological, ethnological, sociological and medico-historical analyses. The examples are selected from different parts of the country, from Northern Croatia and Slavonia to Istria and Dalmatia.

Results. It is evident that old age and dying among the people of rural Croatia was understood as a natural and inevitable part of human life. The obtained data indicate the variety of concepts, such as the attribution of the status of an old person. "Old age" was mostly defined through the utilitarian concept of life which was primarily evaluated from the aspects of social usefulness and working ability of a person. In the Croatian rural communities, the value of life was expressed through desirable qualities such as "healthy", "strong", and "good worker", which in a way included wisdom as maturity. There is no significant reference to the *wealth* or *poverty* as dominant criteria, probably because the majority of Croatian peasants of that time were poor. Social status and quality of care depended to a great extent on the general opinions about individual's morality and kindness in the past and present period of life. Frugality and moroseness, selfishness and stubborn resistance to modernization of life style were pointed out as the main reasons and justification for isolation and inadequate care for the elderly. Such attitudes were strongly expressed by the common people and elderly themselves referring to their own sensibility to old age and death in general, including their status in the society and family.

Conclusions. At the turn of the century there was a dichotomy between ideal, declarative morality and desirable habits on one side, and care for elderly, sick, disabled or dying person on the other, mostly because of the dichotomy between traditional and Christian philosophy, and the reality of life itself.

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