

KINESIOLOGY



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The Structure of Physical Activity in Seniors from Lesser Poland

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Abstract

Background. Physical activity is seen as one of the more important factors of human health. Many authors have highlighted benefits of physical activity for the elderly, claiming that it: slows down the progression of processes related to involution and modern-age diseases, promotes social activity, is a pleasurable way of spending one's spare time among other people, which makes it a perfect antidote to loneliness.

Problem and Aim. This paper aims at analysing the structure of physical activity in seniors living in Lesser Poland.

Method. The research was conducted within the scope of the PolSenior nationwide programme, financed in the form of a grant by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (ref. no. PBZ-MEIN-9/2/2006).

Results and Conclusions. As people age, the percentage of those who spend their spare time actively decreases. The most frequent reason why the researched seniors from Lesser Poland take up physical activity is the willingness to improve and preserve health, as well as the need for rest. Quite surprisingly, the least important of factors that determine physical activity in seniors are doctors' recommendations, which may prove that the medical environment tends to underestimate this type of activity.

Introduction

According to the UN's data, a population is aging, if more than 7% of its members are over 65 years old [Polish Central Statistical Office 2013: 1-9; Zoledowski 2013: 29-43].

The problem of ageing populations is common to all well-developed countries of modern Europe and the whole world. In 2010, the population of 27 European Union member countries amounted to 501.1 mln of people, out of which 17.4% were over 65 years old [Ciura, Szymanczak 2012: 126].

Ageing population in Europe results from the constant increase in life expectancy and low birth rates. It is anticipated that the percentage of elderly people aged 65+ in the total EU population will reach 20% in 2040

and as much as 30% in 2060 [Ciura, Szymanczak 2012: 126; Blair 2009: 1-2].

According to a study conducted by Zoledowski, Poland is listed among countries most threatened with depopulation and demographic ageing – demographic changes are very dynamic there. In view of the above-mentioned facts, the problem of ageing should be treated as a priority, which is very difficult [Zoledowski 2013: 41]. According to the Polish General Statistical Office (GUS), the percentage of elderly people aged 65+ is constantly increasing and Lesser Poland is not an exception. In 1990, the percentage of people aged 65+ amounted to 10.3% in the region. In 2000, the number grew to 12.4%, to reach 13.6% in 2010. Moreover, within two years (2010-2012), the percentage increased by another 0.5% and reached 14.1%

[Polish General Statistical Office GUS, 8.11.2013: 62-64]. It is even more alarming that, at the same time, the population of children and young people of up to 19 years of age is decreasing.

The quality of life in modern society depends mostly on caring about one's health, and the benefits of active and regular participation in physical culture are widely known. According to many studies [Rejewski, Mihalko 2001: 23-35; Teoman, Ozcan, Acar 2004: 71-77], physical activity and practising sports according to one's strength and possibilities determines the psycho-physical fitness and physical endurance in elderly age [Chodzko-Zajko 2009: 1510-1530].

The need for physical activity is determined genetically and its intensity varies throughout the entire life. Forms of physical activity recommended and adapted to the needs of elderly people are more limited than in the case of young people or children [Sparling, Snow 2002: 200-205; King *et al.* 2000: 74-83]. Regularity of exercise is the essence of physical activity which, in case of seniors, may have various forms, e.g. exercise, swimming, cycling, walking etc.

Health condition is a significant factor as far as certain forms of activity are concerned. The recommended types of physical effort can be divided into the following categories: endurance, strength and speed – any combinations of these are allowed. The best type of activity for elderly people consists in long, regular movements made at a medium pace, moderate in nature, such as: walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, as well as special exercise that maintains or improves the mobility of joints in limbs and spine. Other forms of physical activity, apart from being generally beneficial to one's fitness, are a pleasant way of spending one's spare time, a cultured form of leisure and entertainment.

Using the term "physical activity", we are not omitting its importance for the psychological sphere of human being, keeping in mind that an individual should be treated holistically, as a complementary unit. This term is used to underline that the physics of a human being constitutes prevalence of mentioned above activity. Such a point of view is at the same time compatible with understanding of the term "physical culture" in the Polish science tradition, which is not only limited to "physical sphere" of human being, but the movement phenomenon considering a plethora of aspects which originated from basic sciences (including social sciences: philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, management sciences, as well as biological sciences: physiology, anthropology, biomechanics). The aim of the article is the analysis of the structure of these activities. Our paper constitutes a part of a bigger project (studies conducted in different parts of Poland by other teams of researchers using the same science methodology and technics (i.e. questionnaires), tailored to meet the analysis requirements especially from the structure perspective. It might be better emphasized in the introductory part of the text which has been accommodated in the revision.

Research methodology

The research was conducted within the scope of the PolSenior nationwide programme, financed in the form of a grant by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (ref. no. PBZ-MEIN-9/2/2006). Detailed description of the project and the ways of study group enrolment have been included in a paper written by Bledowski *et al.* [Bledowski *et al.* 2011: 1003-1009]. The study was conducted by the BGA Social Research Agency from Sopot from 2007 to 2010 by a specially trained team of nurses. The coordinator of the study was the Institute of Molecular and Cellular Biology in Warsaw.

Participants were selected in a random, 3-stage manner. In this paper a part of the obtained results were used: the survey data of 157 men and 187 women aged 65+ and living in Lesser Poland. The results were analysed in three age groups: 65-74, 75-84 and 85+, divided by gender, size of town/city (up to 20,000 inhabitants and above) and the socio-professional standing (blue- and white-collar workers).

The aim of the presented study was an analysis of physical activity among elderly people inhabiting Lesser Poland with consideration of the above-mentioned factors. Results of the study were presented in the form of percentages.

The following questions were asked in the study:

1. What forms of physical activity do the researched seniors undertake? Are there any differences in physical activity, and if yes, what are they, depending on: gender, age, socio-economic standing and place of residence (size of the town/city) of the participants?
2. What are the reasons why the researched seniors take up physical activity?
3. What influences those seniors who do not practise physical activity?

The results

One of the most frequent forms of activity are short walks close to home, a few times a week or more often (73.3% of responses). This tendency decreases with age in women, and in the oldest age group, i.e. 85+, this form of activity was declared only by 62.4% of men and 33.4% of women, however women more often than men (54.8%) declared walking less than once in a month, or even replied that they did not walk at all. This form of activity was claimed to be practised more often – a few times a week – by those who do not perform physical work (79.1%); out of this group, 80.8% women and 74.7% men answered positively, as compared to blue-collar workers (68.0%), where only 63.1% women and 74.5% men admitted going for walks regularly. The size of town/city did not influence the results.

Table 1. Selected forms of physical activity undertaken by the researched seniors a few times a month or more often, divided by age, gender, place of residence and socio-professional standing [%]

No	Factor	Categories	Gender	Short walks close to home	Longer walks, hiking	Gardening	Exercis, aerobics etc.	Cycling	Total
				% of N	% of N	% of N	% of N	% of N	N
1.	Age [years]	65-74	man	74.5	5.1	32.1	21.1	25.4	65
			woman	78.1	9.2	34.1	18.6	9.5	81
			total	76.8	7.7	33.4	19.5	15.2	146
		75-84	man	75.8	16.4	41.7	3.6	26.8	61
			woman	69.5	3.9	26.1	13.1	9.1	57
			total	71.7	8.3	31.5	9.8	15.2	118
		>85	man	62.4	2.3	3.5	8.5	6.4	30
			woman	33.4	0.0	3.3	5.4	0.0	48
			total	38.8	0.4	3.3	5.9	1.2	78
		Total	man	74.5	8.5	34.3	15.3	25.3	156
			woman	72.7	7.0	29.7	16.1	8.8	186
			total	73.3	7.5	31.3	15.8	14.5	342
2.	Town/city size [number of inhabi-tans]	Up to 20,000	man	79.1	5.4	41.6	10.8	30.5	76
			woman	70.7	10.1	39.4	6.8	12.0	109
			total	73.3	8.6	40.1	8.1	17.8	185
		More than 20,000	man	70.9	11.1	28.3	18.9	21.1	80
			woman	74.8	3.6	19.3	26.3	5.2	77
			total	73.3	6.4	22.7	23.5	11.3	157
3.	Socio- profession- nal standing	Labourer, farmer	man	74.5	6.9	31.6	7.7	24.2	96
			woman	63.1	9.0	30.2	12.2	9.1	88
			total	68.0	8.1	30.8	10.2	15.6	184
		White- collar worker	man	74.7	11.1	38.2	26.7	27.0	60
			woman	80.8	5.0	31.1	18.4	8.2	91
			total	79.1	6.7	33.1	20.7	13.5	151

Source: Research conducted by the BGA Social Research Agency from Sopot between 2007 and 2010 within the scope of the PolSenior project

Longer walks (duration of a few hours) and hiking trips farther from home or the place of residence, no matter the age, gender, size of town/city and social standing, were claimed to be practised less than once in a month or not at all.

Exercise as a form of physical activity undertaken a few times a week, or even more often, was indicated most frequently by men aged 65-74 (21.1%), women living in towns of up to 20,000 inhabitants (26.3%) and men who do not perform physical work (26.7%).

Cycling was selected definitely more often by men than by women, and with age, the percentage of respondents who indicated cycling as their preferred form of activity decreased significantly, especially among women (no indication in the 85+ age group). Women, no matter their age, size of the town/city and type of job, indicated to practise cycling less than once in a month or not at all (more than 80% of respondents).

Respondents showed a lot of interest in gardening. In the youngest group, 33.4% of respondents selected this type of activity, in the next age group, men (41.7%) indicated it more often than women (26.1%) and the percentage decreased significantly among people aged 80+. Also, out of the white-collar workers living in towns/cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants, men more frequently declared gardening a few times a week or more often (Table 1).

Among the reasons behind undertaking any physical activity, the researched population most often pointed to the health aspect – 70% of men and 60% of women (Table 2). With age, the percentage of people who take up physical activity for health reasons decreases, both in women and in men. In the youngest group, it exceeded 70%, while in the elderly aged 85+, it was just below 40%. People who live in smaller towns less frequently (59%) point to the health aspect of physical activity, than those who inhabit cities (73%). The socio-professional standing does not seem to particularly influence this aspect.

The second most frequent reason why the researched seniors take up physical activity is the need for rest. It was mentioned by 32% of the researched seniors of both genders. With age, this percentage shows a significant decrease, just like with the first and most frequent reason. Seniors aged between 65 and 74 pointed to it in more than 35% cases (40% of men) and in the oldest group, the total was 14%; i.e. 25% of men and 12% of women in the researched group. Those who live in bigger towns/cities declared more often (37%) than those who live in small towns and villages (29%) that fulfilling this need was an important factor in deciding to practise physical activity. Also, the professional standing of the researched people seems to be a differentiating factor.

Table 2. Reasons why the researched seniors take up physical activity differentiated by age, gender, place of residence and socio-professional standing [%]

No	Factor	Categories	Gender	„For health’	„Because of the need for active leisure’	„Just to kill time’	„It’s a habit, I used to practise sports when I was younger’	„By doctor’s recommendation’	Total
				% of N	% of N	% of N	% of N	% of N	N
1.	Age [years]	65-74	man	76.7	39.2	11.5	30.1	10.3	63
			woman	67.8	33.8	12.1	16.1	6.9	79
			total	71.0	35.7	11.9	21.1	8.1	142
		75-84	man	59.4	19.2	19.5	15.5	6.0	58
			woman	62.8	33.4	25.0	15.4	3.5	54
			total	61.6	28.4	23.1	15.5	4.4	112
		85	man	51.3	25.4	39.6	5.3	4.5	28
			woman	37.2	11.7	55.7	4.2	8.9	49
			total	39.6	14.1	52.9	4.4	8.2	77
		Total	man	70.7	32.6	14.7	25.0	8.8	149
			woman	64.3	32.3	18.8	15.2	6.0	182
			total	66.5	32.4	17.4	18.5	7.0	331
2.	Town/city size [number of inhabitants]	Up to 20,000	man	70.0	22.8	16.7	32.8	5.1	72
			woman	54.3	30.3	26.2	14.5	4.9	106
			total	59.2	27.9	23.2	20.3	4.9	178
		More than 20,000	man	71.3	40.8	13.1	18.5	11.9	77
			woman	75.2	34.4	10.9	15.8	7.2	76
			total	73.7	36.8	11.7	16.8	8.9	153
3.	Socio-professional standing	Labourer, farmer	man	69.1	20.7	19.7	24.4	7.0	90
			woman	65.3	20.9	27.8	13.0	4.4	86
			total	66.9	20.8	24.4	17.8	5.5	176
		White-collar worker	man	73.0	49.6	7.6	25.8	11.4	59
			woman	64.6	42.4	10.3	17.5	7.4	91
			total	66.9	44.4	9.5	19.8	8.5	150

Source: Research conducted by the BGA Social Research Agency from Sopot between 2007 and 2010 within the scope of the PolSenior project

Former blue-collar workers are more reluctant to choose physical activity as a form of leisure (20%), as compared to white-collar workers (40%).

An important factor that influences physical activity in elderly people is whether they used to practice sports when they were younger. More than 25% of men and 15% of women indicated that as the reason why they take up exercise. Older respondents highlighted the above-mentioned factor more rarely – 30% of men and 16% of women in the youngest group, and 5% of men and 4% of women in the oldest one. It was more often indicated by men who live in smaller towns (33%) than by those who inhabit cities (18%). The type of work performed by the participants did not influence their responses significantly in this case.

A rather small percentage of the researched seniors (about 18% of all men and women) mentioned fun as the reason why they take up physical activity in their spare time.

Doctor’s recommendation was mentioned the least frequently as a factor that influences the respondents’ physical activity.

Among barriers that limit their physical activity, the researched seniors most frequently mentioned contraindications connected with their health (more than 11% of men and almost 14% of women). This factor showed an increasing tendency with age. In the youngest group, it was mentioned by about 9% of the respondents, while in the oldest one – by more than 40% (50% of women). It was more popular among the inhabitants of smaller towns (18.5%) and blue-collar workers (18.7%), while gender did not matter.

The second barrier was connected with the respondents’ mindset – they did not feel the need for physical activity. Approximately 3% of all participants selected this answer. It was more popular among women (4%) than among men (only 0.7%). There are many factors that may influence this (e.g. habits from a younger age, health condition, mental disposition). The lack of need for physical activity increases with age: in the group of participants aged 65-74, not even one man selected this answer and among women, only 3% did. The figures for the oldest age group were as follows: 3.5% of men and 8.7% of women. Also, it was more frequently declared by

Table 3. Physical and mental barriers to undertaking physical activity by the researched seniors with consideration of their age, gender, place of living and socio-professional standing [%]

No.	Factor	Categories	Gender	Physical barriers related to health	Mental barriers (no need for physical activity)	Total
				% of N	% of N	N
1.	Age [years]	65-74	man	11.1	0.0	65
			woman	8.1	3.2	81
			total	9.2	2.1	146
		75-84	man	11.5	1.9	62
			woman	18.2	4.7	56
			total	15.8	3.7	118
		85	man	25.8	3.5	30
			woman	49.1	8.7	49
			total	44.8	7.8	70
		Total	man	11.6	0.7	157
			woman	13.8	4.0	186
			total	13.0	2.9	343
2.	Town/city size [number of inhabitants]	Up to 20,000	man	15.0	1.5	77
			woman	20.1	7.5	109
			total	18.5	5.6	186
		More than 20,000	man	8.8	0.0	80
			woman	6.9	0.2	77
			total	7.6	0.1	157
3.	Socio-professional standing	Labourer, farmer	man	15.1	1.2	97
			woman	21.5	5.1	87
			total	18.7	3.4	184
		White-collar worker	man	6.3	0.0	60
			woman	7.4	0.8	92
			total	7.1	0.6	152

Source: Research conducted by the BGA Social Research Agency from Sopot between 2007 and 2010 within the scope of the PolSenior project

people living in small towns (5.6% to 0.1% of the inhabitants of cities) and blue-collar workers (3.4% to 0.6% of the white-collar workers) – see Table 3.

Discussion and conclusions

The study results show that the most attractive form of activity indicated by the researched seniors are short walks near their place of residence (a few times a week or more often – a total of 73.3% of responses). This tendency decreases in women with age. Size of the town/city did not make a significant difference. The obtained results do not differ greatly from the results of chosen nationwide studies [Bledowski *et al.* 2011: 1003-1009] or from the results of a research conducted in Silesia [Ignasiak *et al.* 2013: 69] and European research [Tsimbos 2010: 5-15]. The option of exercise a few times a week or even more often was selected most frequently by men aged 65-74, by women living in towns of up to 20,000 inhabitants, as well as by men who are/used to be white-collar workers [Booth *et al.* 2000: 15-22].

The most significant factor that determined the physical activity of the participants, was the will to improve or preserve one's health. Similar observations were made

by Laaksonen *et al.* [2001: 65-73], McAuley *et al.* [2008: 13-20], Ford *et al.* [2008: 194-200] and Ignasiak *et al.* [2013: 67-73] in research of the seniors from Lower Silesia. Both the seniors from Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland also pointed to other aspects connected to leisure, spending their spare time or habits cultivated from the time of their youth – similar research by Sparling and Snow [2002: 200-205]. Doctors' recommendations turned out to be the least significant factor.

The personality and socio-cultural determinants of physical activity in elderly people were also analysed by Tsimbos, Pell *et al.* and Ford *et al.* [Tsimbos 2010: 5-15, Pell, McClure, Barlett 2005: 298-304; Ford, Spallek, Dobson 2008: 194-200], who highlighted also the biological aspects (age and gender).

In the many analyses of physical activity in elderly people, there are also references to its axiological context [Zdebska 2012: 237-245, Rejewski, Mihalko 2001: 23-35; Bauman 2007: 319-335]. Usually, it is applied within the scope of instrumental values, where physical effort needs to be undertaken in a given purpose, in this case – to preserve one's health.

Contraindications connected with the health condition of the participants are the greatest barrier. This factor became more and more important as the researched group

got older. Another reason why elderly people do not practise physical activity is connected with their mindset, i.e. they do not feel the need to be physically active.

In the above-mentioned research of seniors inhabiting Lower Silesia [Ignasiak *et al.* 2013: 67-73] and research by Aaltonen *et al.* [2012: 157-163], health discomfort was highlighted by 75% of respondents in younger age groups, more often by men than by women, as a barrier than limits their physical activity.

Among many obstacles that hinder active participation of elderly people in physical culture, many world-famous gerontologists enumerate the 'old man stereotype' [Blair 2009: 1-2; Goodwin 2003: 698-703; ACSM 2010: 1510-1530]. The society associates old age with a decrease in physical and mental strength, a state of being constantly sick and disabled, and often unable to live independently. Breaking this stereotype seems very difficult, however as Europe is facing the issue of ageing population, it is inevitable.

The results of the research inspired us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Men show more interest in active leisure than women, which confirms the need for making steps aimed at activating the female part of the population. Here are some examples of possible solutions: in bigger locations, where Universities of the Third Age operate, a more comprehensive and attractive offer of physical activities should be developed, whereas in smaller towns, local community centres should introduce activities such as physical exercise, Nordic walking, swimming, etc.
2. The most significant of the factors that determine physical activity is the willingness to improve or preserve one's health, while doctors' advice seemed to be the least significant. It is therefore justified to highlight the role of physical activity in the prevention of diseases and improvement of the quality of life of the elderly, so that more doctors recommend this form of activity to their patients during visits.
3. Various forms of physical activity are more often taken up by those people whose work did not require physical effort (former white-collar workers). That might be influenced by the level of education that determines a certain way of life.

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Struktura aktywności ruchowej seniorów Małopolski

Słowa kluczowe: aktywność ruchowa, populacja 65+, Małopolska

Abstrakt

Tło problemowe. Na początku XXI wieku 10% ludności na świecie miało 60 i więcej lat. Zakłada się, że do 2050 r. w tym wieku będzie co piąta osoba. W Polsce sytuacja demograficzna jest zbliżona do pozostałych państw w Europie. Obserwując dane demograficzne można liczyć się z tym, iż liczba osób starszych z roku na roku będzie rosła.

Aktywność ruchowa jest postrzegana jako jeden z ważniejszych czynników zdrowia człowieka. Wielu autorów podkreśla korzyści płynące z aktywności ruchowej osób starszych, między innymi: przeciwdziała postępującym procesom inwolucji, chorobom cywilizacyjnym, sprzyja aktywności społecznej, jest przyjemnym sposobem spędzania czasu wolnego w gronie innych osób, stanowiąc skuteczne antidotum na samotność.

Problem i cel badań. Celem przedstawionych badań była analiza aktywności ruchowej osób starszych z województwa małopolskiego z uwzględnieniem: trzech grup wiekowych: 65 – 74, 75 – 84 i powyżej 85 lat, płci, wielkości miejsca zamieszkania (do 20 tys. i powyżej 20 tys.) oraz statusu społeczno-zawodowego (pracownicy fizyczni i niepracujący fizycznie).

Materiał i metoda. Badania zostały wykonane w ramach ogólnopolskiego programu PolSenior, sfinansowanego jako grant przez Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego (nr PBZ-MEIN-9/2/2006) w latach 2007-2010. Dobór badanych miał charakter losowy, trzystopniowy. Wyniki zostały przedstawione w postaci wartości odsetkowych i dotyczyły form podejmowanej aktywności fizycznej, najczęstszych przyczyn oraz barier jej podejmowania.

Wyniki. Badani seniorzy wśród najczęściej podejmowanych rodzajów aktywności ruchowej wymieniali krótkie spacerunki w pobliżu miejsca zamieszkania. Wykazali także duże zainteresowanie pracą w ogrodzie lub na działce. Stosunkowo niewielki odsetek badanych (około 18% ogółu mężczyzn i kobiet) jako przyczynę podejmowania aktywności ruchowej podało rozrywkę w czasie wolnym.

Wśród barier ograniczających podejmowanie aktywności fizycznej przez seniorów dominowały przeciwwskazania zdrowotne. Drugą barierę stanowiły względy psychiczne – brak odczuwania potrzeby ruchu.

Wraz z wiekiem zmniejsza się odsetek osób spędzających czas wolny w sposób aktywny. Większe zainteresowanie aktywnym spędzaniem czasu wolnego zaobserwowano wśród mężczyzn, co potwierdza potrzebę działań na rzecz aktywizacji żeńskiej części populacji. Najbardziej znaczącym czynnikiem determinującym aktywność fizyczną była chęć poprawy lub zachowania zdrowia, a najmniej – zalecenia lekarskie.

Wnioski. Należałoby zwrócić większą uwagę środowiskom medycznym na profilaktykę i ogromne znaczenie w niej aktywności ruchowej. Wraz z wiekiem zwiększa się ryzyko utraty zdrowia – wzrasta zachorowalność na różne, często przewlekłe choroby. Świadomość tego faktu powoduje, że osoby w wieku starszym, bardziej niż młodzi ludzie, cenią zdrowie i starają się wpływać na jego stan w sposób aktywny. Z punktu widzenia psychicznego rozwoju jednostki ważne są takie czynniki, jak: poczucie własnej efektywności, kompetencje w przedmiocie aktywności fizycznej, motywacje do aktywnego trybu życia oraz satysfakcję z uczestnictwa w różnych formach aktywności ruchowej. Z czynników natury środowiskowej bardzo dużą rolę przypisuje się rodzinie i nawykom wyniesionym z młodości. Zdrowie stanowi w sensie jednostkowym i społecznym jedną z nadrzędnych wartości (przynajmniej w sferze deklaracji). Tymczasem nie mniej istotne (szczególnie w sferze motywacji) stają się wartości autoteliczne, wykraczające znacznie poza sferę troski o zdrowie. Równie ważne są kwestie związane z odczuwaniem przyjemności, pasji oraz radości, jaką niosą ruch i aktywny wypoczynek. To sprawia, że wysiłek fizyczny jest dla tych osób wartością samą w sobie.