

SPORT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ELDERLY PERSONS

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ABSTRACT. It is known nowadays that sport maintains and improves (physical and mental) health and prolongs life expectancy, a fact mentioned by both those who practice sport in its various forms, and by specialists in physiology, medicine, sociology or sports psychology. *Objectives.* The objective of the present study is to raise awareness of the fact that our life style (including physical activities and recreation through sport) has a major impact - if not an overwhelming one - on our health and on the prolongation of life expectancy. *Methods.* Studies have been carried out on a representative sample of retirees from Transylvania, which have attempted to highlight how the subjects relate to the period of retirement and the marginal place that sports occupy as a way of spending free time in the universe of the preferences of the retirees that have been interviewed. *Results.* The relationship between the overall quality of life of the people and the ways of spending their free time (even by practicing physical exercises and maintenance sports), respectively the practice of performance sports, is obvious: the high percentage of people who practice sport among the total population is itself an indicator of a developed society. *Conclusions.* The elderly in the Transylvanian urban area appreciate their subjective wellbeing as positive and mention as their main needs: maintaining their mental activity, their utility as persons and their relationships.

Keywords: quality of life, sport, leisure activities, pensioners.

REZUMAT. *Sportul și implicațiile sale asupra calității vieții la persoanelor în vârstă.* Este un lucru cunoscut în zilele noastre faptul că sportul întreține și îmbunătățește sănătatea (fizică și mentală) și prelungeste speranța de viață, fapt menționat atât de cei care practică sportul în diversele lui forme, cât și de specialiștii în fiziologie, medicină, sociologie sau psihologie sportivă. *Obiective.* Obiectivul lucrării este de conștientizare a faptului că stilul de viață (având și componenta activităților fizice și de recreere prin sport) are un impact major – dacă nu covârșitor – asupra sănătății și prelungirii speranței de viață. *Metode.* Studiile au fost realizate pe un eșantion reprezentativ de pensionari din Transilvania, care au încercat să evidențieze modul în care subiecții se raportează la etapa pensionării, precum și locul marginal

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pe care îl ocupă sportul ca modalitate de petrecere a timpului liber în universul preferințelor pensionarilor intervievați. *Rezultate.* Relația dintre calitatea vieții de ansamblu a oamenilor și modalitățile de petrecere a timpului liber (și prin practicarea exercițiilor fizice și sporturilor de întreținere), respectiv a practica sportul de performanță, este evidentă: procentele ridicate ale practicanților de sport din rândul populației totale este în sine un indicator al unei societăți dezvoltate. *Concluzii.* Persoanele vârstnice din mediul urban transilvănean își evaluează în mod pozitiv starea de bine subiectivă, iar principalele nevoi sunt: păstrarea activității mintale, utilitatea lui ca persoană și păstrarea relațiilor.

Cuvinte cheie: calitatea vieții, sportul, activități de loisir, pensionari.

Introduction

In contemporary social life, both ordinary people and political and cultural personalities acknowledge sport as a phenomenon with special functions in the development of the individual, especially through its major social implications. Starting from the famous works of J. Dumazedier (1950, 1962), some sociologists point out that the "physical" function of sport, that is, its benefits for the health of the body, leads to an indirect function, namely that of social well-being.

Quality of life is an evaluative concept, being the result of relating the living conditions and activities that make up human life to human needs, values and aspirations. As C. Zamfir indicates (1993), quality of life, "refers both to the overall assessment of life (how good, satisfying life is for various individuals, social groups, organizations), and to the evaluation of different conditions and spheres of life" (p. 79). The following components of the quality of life are considered:

- the quality of the environment
- the human quality of worklife
- the quality of interpersonal relations
- the quality of family life.

Objectives

The awareness that lifestyle (including the component of physical and recreational activities through sport) has a major, if not overwhelming, impact on health and the extension of life expectancy is one of the factors leading to this situation in advanced countries. But things are different in poorer states. Thus, entertainment (that is, sports and hobbies) may not occupy an essential place in the scale of values of these individuals, as it overlaps in their life choices with concerns related to their family, community, profession, etc.

Subjects and methods

This is a recent study (2011) conducted on a representative sample of retirees from Transylvania, with the aim of highlighting how the subjects relate to the retirement stage in their life. Other aspects covered in the survey are ways of relational communication, leisure time activities by pensioners and their views about retirement. The research tool was a questionnaire based on multiple-choice questions.

In what follows, we present some of the findings of our research as they provide a relevant picture regarding the lifestyle and perceived quality of life of the elderly, and the marginal place that sports occupy as a way of spending free time in the universe of the pensioners interviewed.

Results

The main reasons for the elderly people interviewed to stay indoors are shopping (28%), commissions / official problems (22%) and visiting relatives or friends (18%) (Figure 1). Although, overall, being active is considered by the subjects a strategy with the greatest benefits for the elderly, according to their answers ("opportunity to rest after I've worked all my life" and "the loss of all roles accomplished during the active period"), most of them (65.5%) fall under the explanations of the *disengagement theory*, while the "activity" category includes only 24% of the respondents (by their choosing the answer "possibility to practise leisure activities more intensely than during employment") (Figure 2).

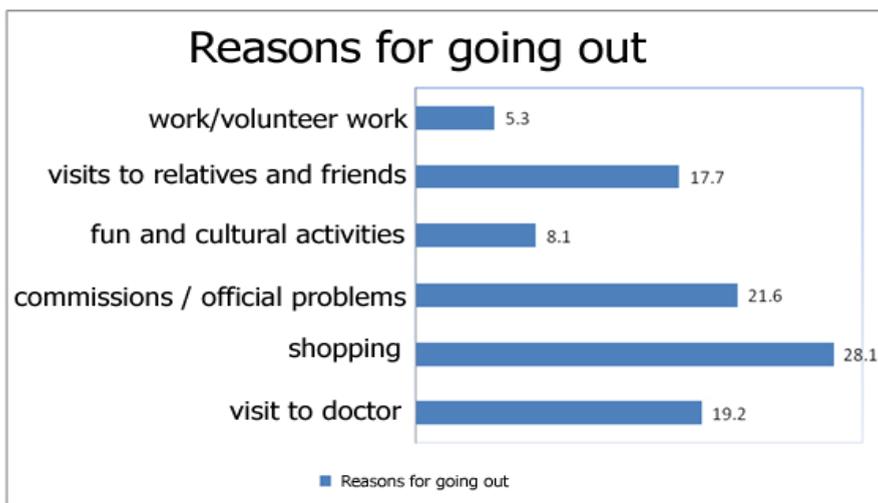


Figure 1. Reasons for older people to go out

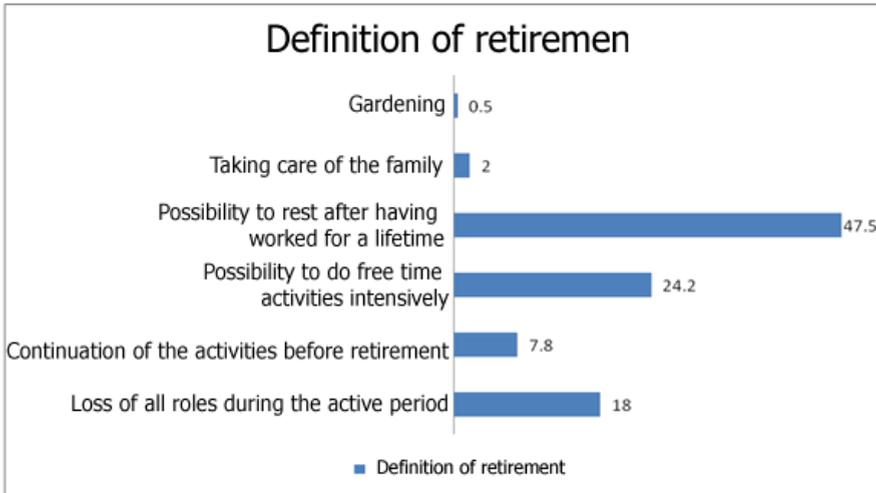


Figure 2. Definition of retirement

Almost two thirds of the respondents (59%) believe that, after daily activities, they have a lot of free time, being busy with activities in or outside the home. Watching TV (31.5%) is the preferred activity in the free time spent at home by the Transilvanian elderly. By watching TV the elderly satisfy their communication and information needs, which they cannot satisfy in their social environment that is limited to their children and, in some happy cases, to relatives or acquaintances (Figure 3).

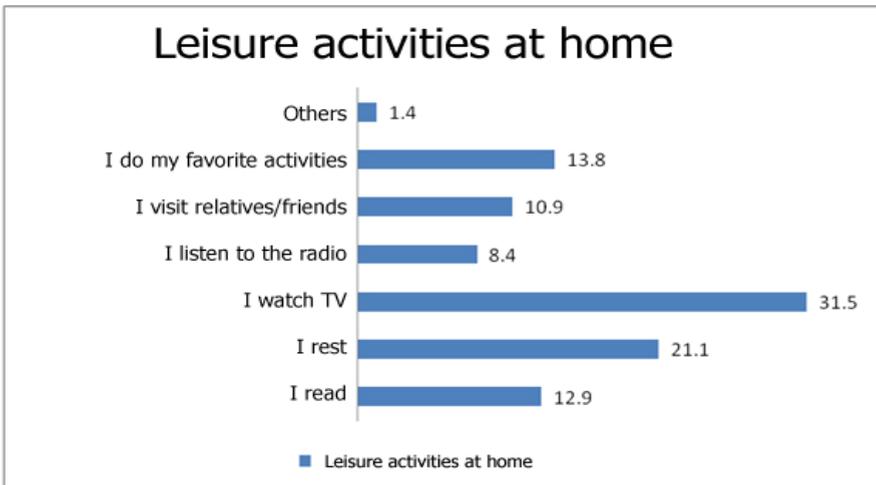


Figure 3. Leisure activities of the elderly at home

The leisure activities outside home preferred by the respondents are: meeting with relatives / friends (30%), walks in the park (26%) and going to church (24.5% - 79% of respondents are Orthodox) (Figure 4).

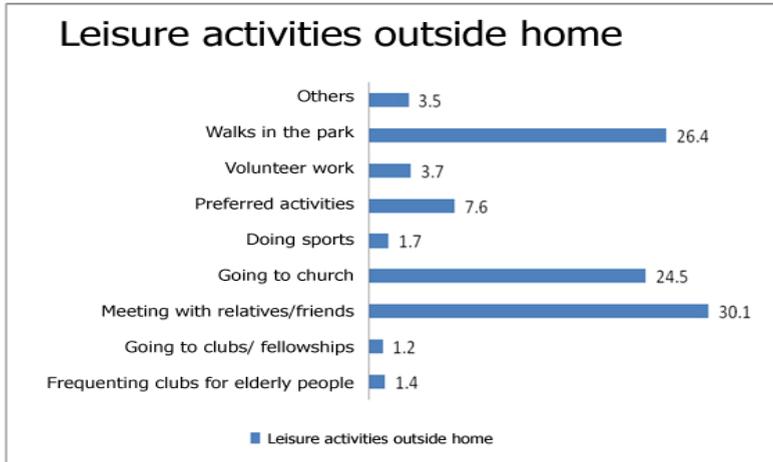


Figure 4. Leisure activities of the elderly outside home

The main needs of the elderly, as shown in the analysis of their responses to the questionnaire are as follows: maintaining mental activity (27%), being useful as persons (21%) and maintaining relationships (21%), while expressive needs with a postmodern potential (to carry out interesting activities, to acquire new knowledge, to have friends / engage in group activities) occur in significantly lower percentages (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Needs and desires of retirees

The most demanded activities are those that help them to maintain their health, the respondents selecting this item in proportion of 34% (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Training activities/fun required by the elderly

The human relationships of the elderly people investigated are lower in intensity after retirement than before retirement, except close family relations (I-IV degree relatives), where the frequency of meetings is higher - 3.69 (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is much lower and 5 much higher). Relations with neighbors are also maintained at the same level as before retirement (Figure 7).

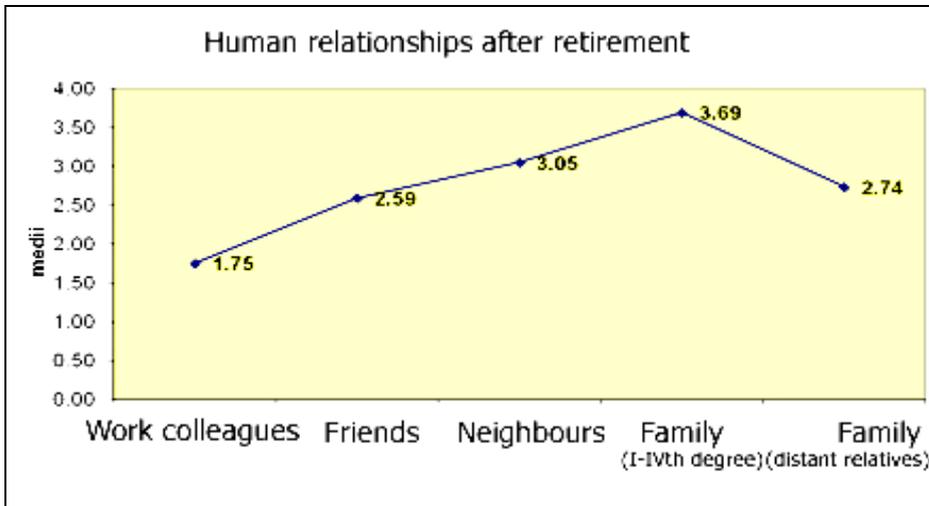


Figure 7. Human relationships after retirement

Most elderly persons (73%) in our sample have grandchildren, that is, they are grandparents, but their answers surprise because they include themselves in the category defined by the literature (Chelin and Furstenberg, 1992 cited in Quadango, 1999) as *distant grandparents*: 42% of them see their grandchildren so rarely that their relationship is just ritualistic and symbolic. Other 28% reveal that they are *companionship grandparents* (they have educational activities and spend free time with their grandchildren), while 27.5% declare that they are *involved grandparents* (they live with their grandchildren and are in constant contact with them).

Conclusions

The main conclusions drawn from the analysis of our research findings are:

- Transylvanian urban elderly people evaluate their subjective wellbeing as positive;
- The higher the income, the greater the degree of satisfaction of current existence needs;
- The higher the level of education of elderly people, the greater their interest in current events;
- Most of the elderly surveyed belong to the disengagement theory;
- Women have a higher frequency of meetings with neighbors and close family (first - forth degree relatives), as compared to men, who have a higher frequency of meetings only with close family;
- The main roles of elderly persons in the family regard household administration and support of various kinds, while the roles they can have in society are of affective and educational counselling;
- More than half of our respondents belong to the category of involved grandparents and companionship grandparents;
- Watching TV is the favourite leisure activity at home, while the most frequent leisure activities outside the home are meeting with relatives / friends, walks in the park and church attendance;
- The main needs of elderly people are to maintain their mental activity, to be useful to the others and to maintain their relationships;
- The activities that a pensioner can do for their community are: taking care of the green areas, administration, counselling / consultation, various repairs, volunteering, etc.
- Most elderly persons do not frequent the clubs / day centers created for them.

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