

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY OF WOMEN AGED 50+ IN THE LARGE CITY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. *The number of older adults is increasing in all European countries and these tendencies are also noticeable in Poland. Maintaining a good psychophysical status through participation in various forms of activity is known to be the precondition for successful ageing. The family status of older adults is characterized by feminization (the major part of the population of older adults is women). Older adults in Poland report their health status as poor and feel lonely. To address this problem, the Long-Term Senior Policy for 2014-2020 specified the areas of corrective measures where recreational activity takes top place. The best form of physical activity for seniors is physical recreation which is connected with relax while performing stimulating, adaptive, compensating, informational or hedonist functions. Many cities in Poland are engaged in the initiatives aimed at older women and implement extended local programs of activation for older adults. The study presents the forms of support for activity in the urban environment of Częstochowa, with particular focus on recreational activity of women aged 50+.*

Keywords: *activity, recreation, health, women 50+, city.*

Introduction

Recent years have seen an increase in older adults aged 50+, representing an increasing percentage of the Polish society. The most important causes of the increase in the number of people at this age include longer life expectancy and a decline in birth rate. The prognoses of the Central Statistical Office of Poland show that the number of women in Poland aged 50+ increases to 26.5 % (now 16.3 %), with the dynamics of the increase being the highest in Europe. Both current situation and prognoses suggest that the process of ageing in Poland is substantially feminized. Feminization of the population of older adults, expressed by the higher number of women has become substantial, with this index being 38 % in 2015 and expected to increase to 40 % by 2045. Another characteristic feature is territorial variation of the older population, with the highest percentage (22 %) of older adults living in Łódź and Silesian

Voivodeships and the lowest (19 %) in Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship and Subcarpathian Voivodeship. The demographically oldest city is Łódź (ca. 26 %), whereas the youngest is Rzeszów (19 %). As results from prognoses, the biggest percentage of people aged 65+ will be observed in the eastern macroregions (ca. 24 %) and southern-western parts of Poland, whereas the highest percentage of those 80+ will live in southern-western and central parts of the country (ca. 7.5 %). Another tendencies is singularization of the old age, i.e. a high percentage of older adults living in single-person households. By 2030, almost 53 % of one-person households will be composed of people 65+, including 17 % of seniors over 80 years of age (Błądowski & Szatur-Jaworska, 2012).

According to the Eurostat survey, 26 % of Polish women were involved in sports or other physical activities for at least 150 minutes a week. The highest percentage of physically active women was observed in Denmark (57 %), whereas the fewest were found in Romania (4 %). The most frequent form of physical recreation of women in the countries of the European Union is walking and tourism (28 %). It should be also emphasized that greater activity is observed for the population of the Northern Europe compared to its southern part (Życie kobiet i mężczyzn, 2017).

Other popular forms of activity of women in the European Union include participation in cultural and social events (28 %), seeing historical monuments and travelling (27 %), and attending sports events (13 %). (Biernat & Piątkowska, 2012).

The report “Polish women 50 plus” (Raport Polki 50 plus, 2015; rynekseniora.pl, 2017), which included epidemiological analyses and experts' opinions, demonstrated that social, professional, family and health situation of women aged 50+ is much varied. Systematic and political transitions have also led to cultural transformations. More and more women decide to have children in their forties, work, learn new technologies, start their own businesses and use EU funds.

Professional activity is motivating, with women 50+ participating in the workshops of personal development and coaching, learning good time management, assertiveness and positive thinking. Polish women aged 50+ are aware that caring for their body and health is a must in contemporary world while fitness and good body shape is a precondition for being successful.

The focus of the present study is on the social context of ageing of women aged 50+, which are in the period of “mature adulthood”, in the pre-retirement period. The topic of the analyses is activity of women living in the environment of big cities, with particular focus on recreational activity.

Social context of ageing of women 50+

Situation of women aged 50+ is much varied and depends on many factors. Part of them work professionally, some of them look for jobs, others are busy with raising grandchildren and support children in their households.

The period of living of women in the fifth decade of life is a beginning of professional deactivation and the increasing health problems. In the biological aspect, the characteristic feature is menopause, physical and psychical problems related to menopause, and the intensifying metabolic and hormonal changes. This period is marked by the decreasing psychophysical capacity and body adaptation capability. Cardiovascular diseases, bone and articular diseases, diabetes, cancers, obesity and hypertension are more frequently diagnosed or intensify at this age. Obesity in women is becoming not only the aesthetic and psychological problem but it also affects health. In subjective terms, 50 % of women assess their health as good and 20 % - as bad. Among the factors that impact on successful ageing are economic independence, support of the closest family and friends, active lifestyles, cognitive curiosity and interests, and, first and foremost, good health status, fitness and being independent of others (Diagnoza obecnej sytuacji kobiet i mężczyzn 50+, 2013).

There are 74.7 % professional active women aged 45 to 54 years and 28.2 % of those aged 55 to 64 years (Raport Polki 50 plus, 2015). It is estimated that the ratio of people at the age of professional activity compared to the number of retired people in the EU will have reached 2:1 by 2050. In the ongoing discussion about the retirement age in Poland, women's opinions vary. Better educated women, for whom the work is not only the source of income, are for the extension of the retirement age.

Women who perform physical, boring and poorly paid jobs indicate the difficulties in balancing the professional and family life. The employers emphasize the professional assets of women 50+, such as positive attitudes to professional work, reliability, responsibility, independence, emotional stability and that they are calm, can work better in teams and have good professional experience.

Half of working women are planning to retire, whereas 30 % want to continue working (Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy, GUS, 2017). For these middle-aged women, work is one of the basic stimuli of activity in life, improved motivation to care for psychical and physical fitness. It is often the major source of making a living as the pensions and other benefits are insufficient. Therefore, 30 % of women who obtain benefits, pensions, retirement pensions or other pre-retirement benefits are involved in additional work, working in the so-called grey economy sector. The return of the people aged 50+ is now more and more often emphasized. The Lisbon strategy

developed by the EU assumes e.g. the increase in the employment rate in the group of people aged between 50 and 64 years of age to the level of 50 %, with ca. 27 % in Poland. A substantial unemployment rates were observed in the early nineties of the 20th century in Poland and one of the methods to reduce it was professional deactivation of people aged more than 50 years. People aged 50 to 64 were made redundant within staff reduction programs and forced to start early retirement and obtained pre-retirement benefits. This policy led to a substantial decline in professional activity of people 50+ (Mol, 2008). Currently the employers and politicians do not doubt that the group of people aged 50+ has a substantial and significant potential in the labour market that should be utilized, consequently leading to socio-economic and individual benefits. Incomes of working senior citizens are on average by 1,000 PLN higher than those of people living only from the pension. Family situation of women 50+ is also varied. Over half of them are supported by social benefits (retirement pensions) and their incomes are lower than those earned by men. Every third pensioner and every eight retired person claims that their money lasts them only for bills and food. Women 50+ are burdened by caring of the dependent people (parents, children). This concerns a fourth of women, who spent over 6 hours a day to care for them (Diagnoza obecnej sytuacji kobiet i mężczyzn 50+, 2013). Most of women in the age range of 50 to 59 years are married, with only 1 in 10 living alone. At the age of 60 to 69 years, there are twice more single women. Both widowhood and children leaving the family houses require adaptation to life, replacing family roles and structure of duties: social interactions change and the feeling of loneliness appears (Ostrowska, 2015). The position of women 50+ in Polish families depends on ties and coherence of the family, systems of value and economic and cultural conditions. Nowadays, there are still contradictory views concerning traditional understanding of the role of old people in the family with modern role models derived from the countries of the Western Europe, where anatomy of the members of the family is strongly accentuated and seniors, as a social group, are more and more dependent on the family. The number of older adults living with their children in Poland has significantly reduced.

Recreational activity of women aged 50+ and its conditioning

The importance of activity of older adults has been known and documented scientifically. Doctors, psychologists and employees of social support emphasize the beneficial effect of physical and recreational activity on the process of successful ageing.

Physical activity means planned, conscious and regular human activity, oriented at improving health and requiring physical and psychical effort. Sport

and physical recreation are often termed “sport for everyone” and used as a means of body recovery, improving vitality and is often treated as an entertainment and performed collectively or individually (Dąbrowski, 2006). Due to the level of difficulty, the forms of physical activity can be divided into easy (cycling), medium (swimming, ball games) and difficult (skiing), whereas in terms of the seasons of the year, there are summer (bathing, diving), winter (skating, skiing) and whole-year (outdoor, indoor and field sports) activities. Functions of the sport and recreation have changed over the years. Nowadays, the health, prevention, education, integration, social and economic functions are most often emphasized. The governmental programme for activation of older adults for the years 2014-2020 (Rządowy Program na rzecz Aktywności Społecznej Osób Starszych, 2014) assumes the improvement in the conditions which allow for active participation of older adults in various forms of activity and impact on the health status and the improvement in the quality of life of women at the pre-retirement age. Local environments also implement activities for seniors and people at the 'forefield of old age' (Program działań na rzecz seniorów, 2014). Promotion of active lifestyles of women is more and more often supported by non-governmental organizations, e.g. European 50+ Physical Activity Promotion Association (EPARA 50+), which associates experts on physical activity for people aged 50+. Since 2009, the organization collaborates with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, with its main aim being promotion of physical activity through implementation of recreational programs and sports events with local and national range. Women participate in physical and recreational classes for three months (Nordic walking, pilates, round dance, aqua fitness), according to the motto “I chose myself” (www.espar-50.pl, 2017). The demographic data of the Central Statistical Office of Poland show that women in Częstochowa account for 53 % of the inhabitants of the city and the feminization rate is 113 (there are 113 women per 100 men). Mean age of women is 45.9 years, whereas there are 66.1 % of the city population are women aged 15 to 64 and 22.2 % of those aged 65+. Furthermore, there are 54.7 % of women at the working age and 31.3 % at the post-working age (59+). 24.1 % of women have tertiary education, 40.5 % - secondary and post-secondary education, 14.5 % - vocational education and 6.4 % - primary education (www.polskawliczbach.pl, 2015). The opportunities for recreational classes in Częstochowa for women at the pre-retirement and retirement age vary. Physical activity classes are organized by local governments, district clubs, the Centre for Senior Activity, the City's Sports and Leisure Centre, senior clubs, the University of the Third Age, the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society, and non-governmental organizations e.g. the Athletic Częstochowa Association. There are more and more recreational fields dedicated to inhabitants at different age. They are located in each district and in many settlements and enjoy much

popularity. The campaign “Pogodna jesień - starzej się zdrowiej” (“Happy autumn: age healthier”) offers free sports and recreation classes for seniors. This means gymnastics (3 times a week), zumba and aerobics (3 times a week), dancing clinics (2 times a week). The particular form which is strongly recommended for older women is Nordic walking. This special walking technique improves strength and endurance of arms, relieves load from joints and helps maintain healthy body posture, balance and stability. The equally beneficial forms of activity are water gymnastics, swimming, aqua aerobics, aqua zumba. Zumba gold classes are also organized in the Częstochowa Sports Hall, with great popularity among middle-aged women. A survey was conducted to obtain the answer about the forms of physical and recreational activities which are the most popular in women aged 50+ living in Częstochowa. The survey was responded by 192 women (97 working and 95 professionally inactive).

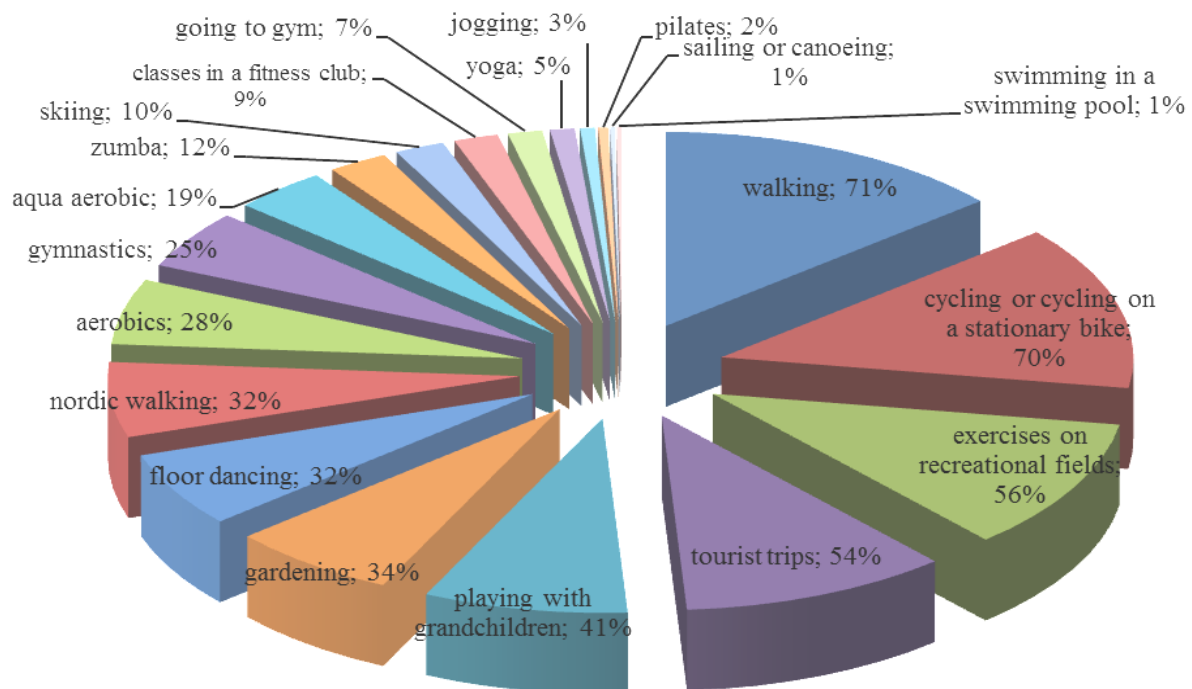


Figure 1. **Forms of recreational activity of professionally active women aged 50+ (multiple choice)**

The forms of activity of working women are multiple. The most frequent include walking (71 %), cycling on a bike or a stationary bike (70 %), exercises on district recreation fields (56 %) and tourist trips (54 %). Gardening is preferred by 34 % of women whereas playing with grandchildren - by 41 %. Few women swim (1 %), jog (3 %) and participate in fitness classes (9 %).

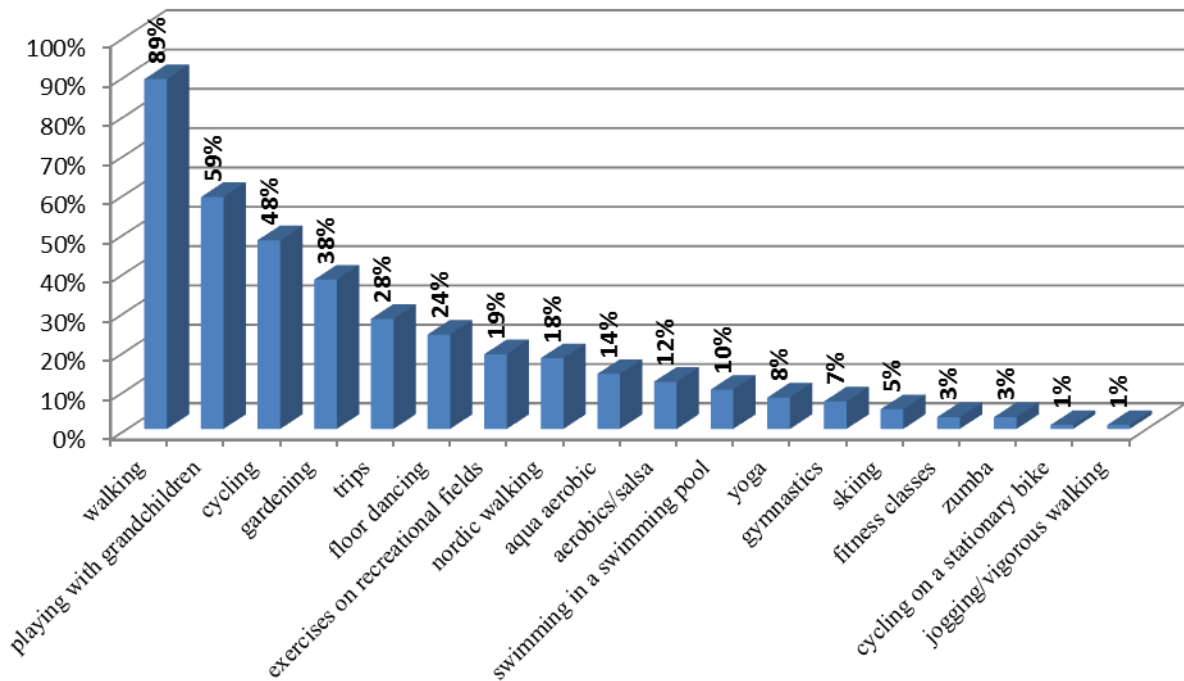


Figure 2. **Forms of recreational activity of professionally inactive women aged 50+ (multiple choice)**

The most frequent forms of activity of professionally inactive women include walking (89 %), playing with grandchildren (59 %) and gardening (38 %). Furthermore, the respondents mentioned trips (28 %), floor dancing (24 %) and exercises in recreational fields (in districts, 19 %). The fewest women do jogging or vigorous walking and cycling on a stationary bike.

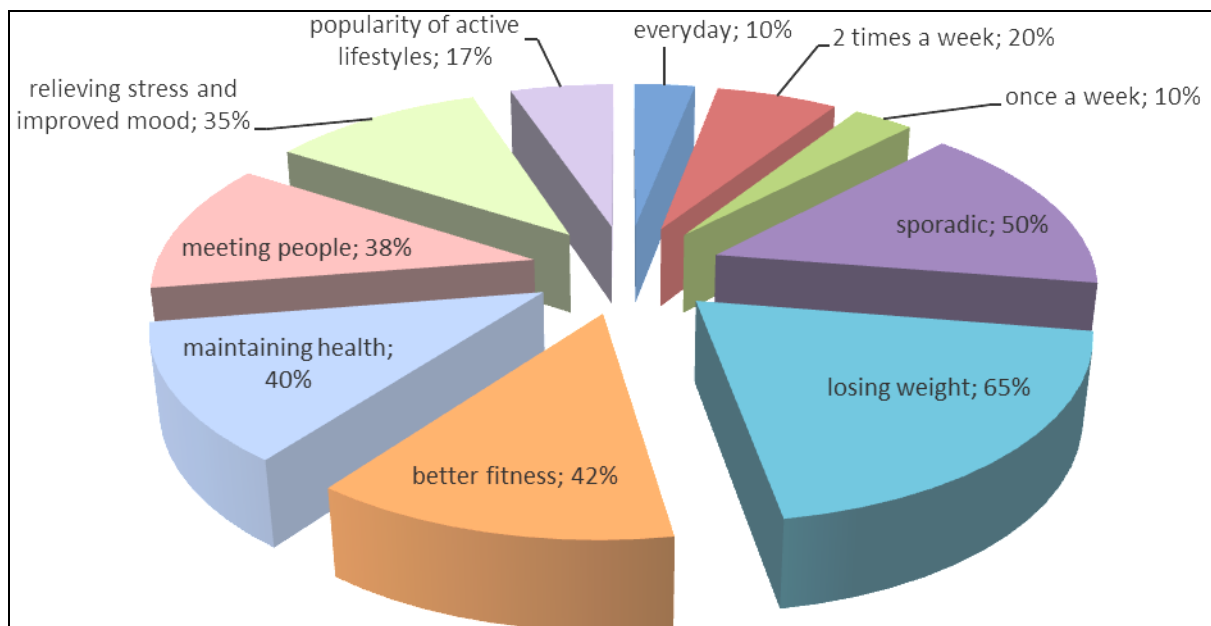


Figure 3. **Frequency and motivations for taking physical activity by women 50+**

Half of the women is involved in sporadic physical activity, 20 % of them do this twice a week and 10 % everyday. Among the motivations for taking up recreational activity, the women reported losing weight (65 %), increasing fitness (42 %) and maintaining health (40 %), opportunity to meet people (38 %) and relieving stress and improving mood (35 %). The conclusions which can be drawn from the analysis of the study results are: Professional work is conducive and motivating for taking up recreational activity. Professionally active women are more physically active and participate in varied forms of activity and are more aware of what the local community offers. Losing weight and improvement in fitness are the main motivations for taking up activating actions in both groups of women 50+. Professionally inactive women spent more time for home and family activities (playing with grandchildren, gardening). However, recreational activity in both groups is sporadic, with only 10 % of women admitting that they take up physical activity on a regular basis.

Conclusions

As voluntary activity, physical recreation results from human needs, offering satisfaction, relax and relieving negative emotions. Decisions on taking up participation in physical activities are varied and result from the type of motivation. A health-hygiene type and social type of motivation is dominant in women 50+, whereas the choice of activity results from maintaining or improving health status, fitness, body shape and beauty and the need for meeting other people. Modern societies reject stereotypes concerning the old age and more and more women understand that physical activity leads to improved health and mood. There are many opportunities offered for older adults aged 65+ in Częstochowa, but few of them are dedicated to women at the pre-retirement age. Obviously, women 50+ can joint older people but many of them do not feel seniors yet and choose individual forms of recreation.

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