

CHAPTER 6

ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN BY PERSONS IN LATE ADULTHOOD AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING¹

INTRODUCTION

The human lifespan is gradually being prolonged with the progress in healthcare and increasingly more commonly followed healthy lifestyle as well as by the many opportunities of keeping the body in good physical condition. The population of persons reaching an advanced age in life is also growing (Straś-Romanowska, 2011) as is the number of persons facing the problem of redefining themselves and their own physical activity after having reached the end of their working life and going on retirement (*ibid.*). One of the challenges arising at this time is adapting to a greater amount of free time which so far was taken up by work, and organising one's personal resources and milieu so that they may be conducive to physical and psychological health (Steuden, 2011).

Many research findings have reported that the undertaking of various types of activity by elderly persons which, to a certain extent, replace their work duties, determine a successful adaptation to the ageing process (Grzanka-Tykwińska & Kędziora-Kornatowska, 2010; Steuden, 2011). It was shown that physical activity (e.g. daily exercises or regular walks) not only ensure the slowing down of the somatic ageing process (Bee, 2004; Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, 1995), but also has a positive effect on the mental capacity and psychological well-being of elderly persons (Bee, 2004; Lampinen et al., 2006). Similarly, the stimulation of cognitive functions in persons in the later years of life has not only enabled mental development but also raised the level of life satisfaction (Czerniawska, 2003; Steuden, 2011). Studies conducted on the psychological well-being of

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elderly women that were continuing or not their education at the University of the Third Age (UTAs) have shown that women that adopted student roles manifested a higher level of emotional, personality and social well-being than those that failed to participate in the UTA (Wojciechowska, 2008).

Thus, it can be accepted that remaining active in late adulthood, similarly to the earlier stages of human life, constitutes an important developmental factor (Niewiedział, 2008; Słapińska, 2007), and that various types of activity can perform different adaptive functions. On the other hand, a sense of life quality of an individual, to be more precise, their subjective, psychological well-being can be accepted to be a significant manifestation or indicator of the adaptation process to the senior age (Niewiedział, 2008; Wojciechowska, 2008). Since the fact that physical exercise and intellectual stimulation unquestioningly give rise to a positive sense of well-being among persons in late adulthood, the question arises as to what other types of activity undertaken by persons in their later years of life can assist and support the adaptation process to ageing, in other words, according to the premises of the concept of well-being (Keyes & Waterman, 2003), connected with an acceptance of the self and of the world, a sense of satisfaction from the performed social roles, or a conviction of having a significant impact on the life of those around them or a sense of purpose in life.

THE ACTIVITY OF PERSONS IN LATE ADULTHOOD

The personal activity of an individual, in line with the concepts of psychological development (Liberska, 2011; Przetacznik-Gierowska, 1996; Tyszkowa, 1977), is one of the most important stimulators of development. It is sometimes understood as biologically determined overall activity (Sillamy, 1995: Tyszkowa, 1977), that are specific to the different stages of ontogeny (Kielar-Turska, 2000; Słapińska, 2007). Late adulthood is a special period of activity from which professional work is entirely or to a significant extent eliminated and free time is filled with voluntary activities undertaken for rest, pleasure, creative ambitions or spiritual needs (Gordon, Gaitz & Scott, 1976 quoted after: Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011). Tasks connected with doing things for other people, related with fulfilling grandparent roles or participating in a peer social groups (Słapińska, 2007) are also fulfilled during this time.

Researchers (Bossé & Ekerdt, 1981 quoted after: Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2011) attempting to order the issues concerning the activity of elderly persons have suggested singling out four of these basic categories: 1) cultural activity, an example of which is participation in sports events, concerts, religious services; 2) physical – games involving physical activity, going to the gym,

tourism or gardening; 3) social – keeping in touch with friends, taking part in social gatherings; and 4) solitary – reading books or watching television. Attempts have also been made to designate lifestyles on the basis of the dominant forms of spending free time by elderly persons (Czerniawska, 1998). Lifestyle is most commonly understood as a person-specific system of convictions and values, perceptions of the world, motives of actions and ways of reacting (Steuden, 2011; Zych, 2007).

The following styles have been diagnosed on the basis of observations (Czerniawska, 1998): 1) completely passive lifestyle, characterised by a reduction in social contacts; 2) family-oriented style, manifest in focusing on looking after grandchildren and helping children out; 3) a lifestyle revolving around different forms of physical activity, e.g. doing the gardening, 4) social activity style involving participation in various associations or social and political formations; 5) a style concentrated on activities in the home; 6) a religious style, actively participating in religious life; and 7) an educational style – fostering personal development and continuing education. The passive style is considered to be the least beneficial from the point of view of an elderly person's personal development, it is also frequently connected with illness, a significant loss of strength or reduced physical mobility. It is associated with a reduced psychological self-esteem of the individual (Czerniawska, 1998; Steuden, 2011), which may be both the result of a poor physical condition and limited social contacts as well as the cause of social withdrawal. The remaining styles are more active in nature and their functions vary depending on the content of the style. It has been highlighted that all the styles apart from focusing on activity in the home, are conducive to shaping a sense of being useful, of having a causative effect and efficiently performing tasks, enabling the shaping of a sense of identity to a social group and taking on responsibility for others (Steuden, 2011).

Significant data was collected from impressive studies on the differentiation of activity undertaken by persons in late adulthood, which was collected from a randomly selected sample of 1,821 persons aged over 65 years, residing in various parts of Poland. The objective of the research was to describe as precisely as possible the actual way that Polish pensioners function in society (Synak, 2002). Attention should be paid to the fact that the results were obtained on the basis of the personal accounts of the respondents. Studies that are conducted so reliably, are more trustworthy. Five types of activity performed by elderly persons in their free time were identified by analysing the study material (Halicka & Halicki, 2002). They included: 1) Recreational and hobby-related activities — hobbies (comprising of: physical activity, creative activity and culture-related activity); 2) receptive activity (activity undertaken in the home, e.g. reading newspapers or watching television); 3) activity oriented towards the public (connected

with social and political activity and participation in the life of the parish); 4) integrative activity (taking place at social, scientific and training gatherings, as well as social and charity actions); and 5) „other” activity, connected with occasional activity outside the scope of the above classification (e.g. solving crosswords, taking naps, reflecting and meditation, as well as prayer).

The above studies have enabled the preferences and determinants of the established activities to be identified. It turned out that the older persons – over the age of 75 years, usually undertook receptive activity. This group mainly consisted of handicapped persons without higher education, declaring a high level of loneliness. The younger respondents, on the other hand – aged between 65 and 74 years, spent a lot of their free time on integrative activity. This group included persons with at least secondary education, living in medium-sized cities and, despite being mainly comprised of people living alone, very few of them claimed to be lonely. The results of the diagnosis showed, however, that the younger seniors (65 and 75 years of age) highly valued recreational and hobby-related activity, although this preference tended to be stronger in men than in women. It was also found that public-oriented activity was the least commonly undertaken by Polish pensioners. It may seem at first that this is not unusual, however, research on the activity of persons over the age of 55 that was conducted in 2011 in European Union countries (Eurostat, 2012) showed that taking an active part in political parties and organisations is far behind being active in sports and recreational organisations, which are in first place. However, it turns out that elderly persons in the European Union are relatively more strongly involved in charity and volunteer work than their Polish peers. The results obtained in studies on elderly persons in the European Union (Eurostat, 2012) ultimately showed that interests in sports and various other physical activities in persons over the age of 55 years clearly drops and social separation is escalated in over ¼ of the population.

The reasons why seniors limit or withdraw from various forms of activities or, on the contrary, become more involved in various areas of life, may be explained on the basis of the selective optimisation and compensation model (SOC) devised by P. Baltes and colleagues (Baltes, Lindenberger and Staudinger, 1998). According to this model, in old age, due to the depletion of resources and numerous deficiencies in the biological fit-out or in the plasticity of developmental changes, it becomes necessary for elderly persons to find areas of life in which they will be able to function more efficiently. Some of the persons may stop at simply coming to terms with the losses incurred and opt for a passive attitude (cf. Słapińska, 2007). Another part may, on the other hand, taking their potential and cultural conditions into account, strive to counteract these deficiencies in a number of ways and to repair the losses in resources so as to lay the foundations for growing old gracefully.

It seems that activity in old age – strength and capacity permitting – may fulfil a compensatory role in relation to the losses resulting from the regression in the biologically determined dispositions. Activity may give them the chance to independently organise their own life, make social ties closer, give rise to a self-acceptance or satisfaction from their own existence. The mentioned aspects are a dimension of psychological well-being.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL CONCEPT OF KEYES AND WATERMAN

The concept of psychological well-being was initially linked with the category of happiness or life satisfaction. Nowadays, investigators consider this approach to be insufficient and refer to the three-dimensional concept of subjective psychological well-being by C. Ryff, C.L.M. Keyes and M.B. Waterman (Keyes & Waterman, 2003). According to this concept, well-being should be looked at from two different aspects – from the hedonistic and eudaimonic approach. From a hedonistic point of view, well-being signifies a sense of satisfaction and happiness (emotional well-being), whereas, from an eudaimonic approach – well-being is the experience of fulfilment in life and the conviction that a person is utilising their dispositions in life well (personality well-being), as well as the sense of being a meaningful member of a reliable and predictable society, providing the appropriate conditions for the overall development of its members (social well-being).

Each of the dimensions of well-being is made up of many different aspects. Emotional well-being is comprised of a sense of happiness, experiencing both positive and negative emotions, overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with various aspects of life. Personality well-being (also referred to as psychological well-being by C. Ryff) contains six of the following dimensions: 1) life goal, in the sense of a conviction that personal life is directed at fulfilling an important plan; 2) environmental mastery – a sense of control over the milieu and being able to cope with various difficulties; 3) personal development – the conviction of possessing the ability to expand one's competences and look for opportunities of further development; 4) autonomy – considering oneself to be an independent authority capable of following personal standards; 5) positive social relations – conviction of maintaining and experiencing positive interpersonal relations; 6) self-acceptance – a positive attitude towards one's Self. Social well-being according to C.L.M.Keyes is described in five dimensions. The dimensions include: 1) social acceptance, meaning the sense of confidence in society due to its traits and the conviction that its members are friendly and supportive of

others; 2) social actualisation – an individual's belief in the positive evolution of society and the possibility of progress and actualisation through it; 3) social contribution – an individual's evaluation of his/her social value and a belief of having something valuable to share with society; 4) social coherence – the perception of the world as being foreseeable, comprehensible and reasonable; and 5) social integration – an individual's sense of being a part of society and that it has a lot in common with its members.

The multi-faceted and complex concept of social well-being enables a deeper insight to be gained into the features of a „good life” of persons of any age but its insight seems to be particularly useful in the period of differentiated functional models, namely, in late adulthood.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

The area under examination is positive ageing, understood as an optimal adaptation to the developmental changes that appear as people grow older. The late adulthood stage is characterised by numerous losses and growing limitations in the biological and psycho-social sphere. The question arises as to which attitude and form of activity will be a compensatory response to the experienced losses. In accordance with the conviction that human development has a functional dimension and its course involves decisions and actions on a behavioural level, the assumption was adopted that the activities undertaken may constitute a variable describing the level of adaptation of persons in late adulthood (cf. Baltes, Lindenberger & Staudinger, 1998). The underlying question was whether undertaking any type of activity is a sufficient enough factor that can be considered beneficial and conducive to healthy ageing, or whether there are certain types of activities that when undertaken are connected with achieving a higher level of psychological well-being.

The following research questions were posed:

- 1) Does undertaking certain activities like recreational activities, hobbies, receptive, public and integrative activities differentiate the level of emotional, personality and social well-being in persons in their late adulthood?

HYPOTHESIS:

- 1) Undertaking or not of activities by persons in late adulthood differentiates the level of their psychological well-being. Persons undertaking more

intense activity achieve the highest level of psychological well-being compared to less active persons.

MEASURED VARIABLES

- 1) Forms of activity undertaken in free time: a) recreational and hobbies; b) receptive; c) public; and d) integrative.
- 2) Psychological well-being: personality, social and emotional.

RESEARCH METHODS

In order to verify the hypothesis, two questionnaires were applied and socio-demographic data was collected. The first questionnaire, devised by L. Wojciechowska and B. Bąk (2007), was used to measure subjective emotional, personality and social well-being. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability equals: for personality well-being $\alpha = 0.785$; for social well-being $\alpha = 0.785$; and for emotional well-being $\alpha = 0.904$. The second questionnaire intended to measure activity in free time (Sokolnicka, 2011) was based on a list of types and forms of activity established in research headed by B. Synak (2002).

A total of 145 elderly persons aged 60-65, 66-75, 76-85 and over 86 years that lived in different regions of Poland, both in large cities and small towns, were studied. The largest number of respondents were in the 75-year-old age group (45% of the subjects), persons aged 76-85 years constituted 36% of the respondents, and the smallest group was represented by seniors aged 86 years or older (5%). The studied group was comprised of 63% women and 37% men.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In order to verify the hypothesis concerning the differences in the sense of well-being experienced by persons in their late adulthood that undertook or not activities in their free time, the frequency of occurrence of specific forms of activity was analysed first (Fig. 1). The most frequently undertaken activity in the studied group was watching television, and the most seldom activity was participation in Farmer's Wives' Associations.

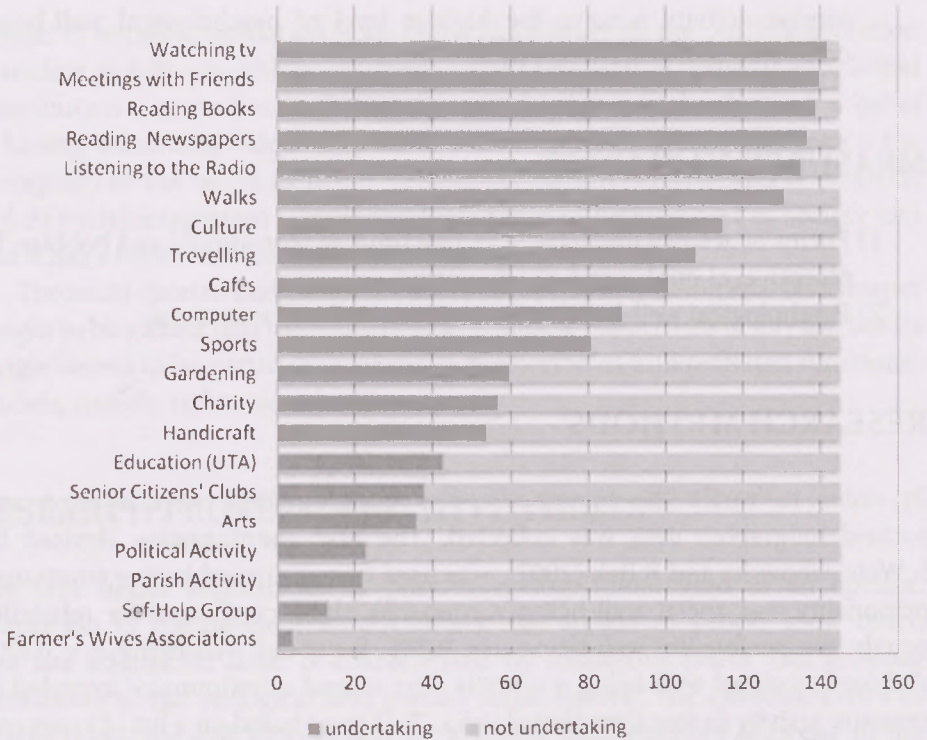


Fig. 1. The number of persons undertaking and not undertaking specific forms of activity

The level of emotional, personality and social well-being was then measured in persons that prefer alternative types and forms of activity. It turned out that the psychological well-being of elderly persons is significantly differentiated in the following forms of activity within the recreational and hobby type: sport, the arts, travelling and culture (Tab. 1). Let us consider sport and travelling more closely. Persons that engaged in sporting activities and travelling achieved higher results on average in all dimensions of well-being: personality, social and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the average results of persons engaging in these activities were statistically significantly higher in all dimensions of emotional well-being (the negative affect, positive affect, satisfaction from various aspects of life, overall life satisfaction, a feeling of happiness) compared to persons that failed to become involved in such activity. Taking part in sports and travelling was also connected with higher average results in the three dimensions of personality well-being of self-acceptance, life goal and personal development. The group of persons that practised sport and the group that did no sport at all was significantly differentiated in terms of the result of the next dimension of personality well-being, namely, a sense environmental mastery.

Activity undertaken by persons in late adulthood...

Table 1. The differences in the level of personality, social and emotional well-being experienced by persons undertaking and not undertaking different types of recreational and hobby activity

ACTIVITY	WELL-BEING	AVERAGE RANK		U	P
		YES	NO		
Walks	Personality	73.97	63.89	789.5	0.393
	Social	74.45	59.43	727.0	0.203
	Emotional	74.06	63.07	778.0	0.352
Sports	Personality	83.60	59.58	1733.0	0.001
	Social	83.29	59.98	1758.5	0.001
	Emotional	85.20	57.55	1603.5	0.000
Gardening	Personality	76.80	70.32	2322.0	0.360
	Social	80.70	67.56	2088.0	0.063
	Emotional	74.22	72.14	2477.0	0.769
Arts	Personality	86.03	68.70	1493.0	0.032
	Social	82.00	70.03	1638.0	0.138
	Emotional	80.14	70.64	1705.0	0.240
Handicraft	Personality	78.85	69.53	2141.0	0.196
	Social	74.92	71.86	2353.5	0.672
	Emotional	73.16	72.91	2448.5	0.972
Travelling	Personality	78.22	54.03	1434.0	0.010
	Social	79.71	53.41	1273.0	0.001
	Emotional	79.50	57.76	1296.0	0.001
Culture	Personality	76.28	60.43	1348.0	0.066
	Social	78.04	53.68	1145.5	0.005
	Emotional	76.47	59.72	1326.5	0.052

Mann-Whitney U test; p – level of significance; Yes-group undertaking activity; No – group not undertaking a given activity

Within social well-being (Tab.1), both persons engaging in sports activities as well as those doing some travelling achieved higher results on the social contribution and social coherence scale compared to persons that undertook no such activity. Travelling also involved higher results in the social acceptance and social actualisation dimension, while doing sports was linked with a higher sense of social integration compared to persons that did not partake in this sort of activity.

Table 2. The differences in the sense of personality, social and emotional well-being in persons undertaking and not undertaking given types of receptive activity

ACTIVITY	WELL-BEING	AVERAGE RANK		U	P
		YES	NO		
Reading Newspapers	Personality well-being	72.98	73.31	545.5	0.983
	Social well-being	73.94	56.94	419.5	0.265
	Emotional well-being	73.27	68.38	511.0	0.749
Reading Books	Personality well-being	74.52	37.83	206.0	0.036
	Social well-being	74.49	38.42	209.5	0.039
	Emotional well-being	75.14	23.50	120.0	0.003
Listening to the Radio	Personality well-being	74.03	59.10	536.0	0.278
	Social well-being	73.16	70.90	654.0	0.870
	Emotional well-being	74.15	57.45	519.5	0.225
Watching TV	Personality well-being	73.56	46.50	133.5	0.269
	Social well-being	73.73	38.50	109.5	0.150
	Emotional well-being	73.55	47.00	135.0	0.279

Among **receptive type** of activity, the differences on the well-being scale between persons engaging in various activities and those not undertaking any activities in this category were evident mainly between persons reading books and persons that did not undertake this form of activity. The Mann Whitney U test revealed a higher level of personality, social and emotional well-being among persons reading books (Tab. 2). The inter-group difference in terms of emotional well-being concerns all the indicators comprising this dimension. Persons that failed to read books achieved lower results on the negative affect, positive affect,

satisfaction from various areas of life, overall satisfaction and the sense of happiness scale. In terms of personality well-being, a significant difference was only revealed in relation to the dimension measuring personal development. Similarly, only one statistically significant difference was found in social well-being, namely, the one referring to the dimension called social integration.

Table 3. The differences in the sense of personality, social and emotional well-being in persons undertaking and not undertaking public-oriented activity

ACTIVITY	WELL-BEING	AVERAGE RANK		U	P
		YES	NO		
Political Activity	Personality well-being	78.93	71.88	1266.5	0.460
	Social well-being	76.83	72.28	1315.0	0.634
	Emotional well-being	70.43	73.48	1344.0	0.749
Social Involvement	Personality well-being	78.90	69.18	2171.5	0.173
	Social well-being	81.61	67.42	2017.0	0.047
	Emotional well-being	77.17	70.30	2270.5	0.336
Parish Activity	Personality well-being	69.52	73.62	1276.5	0.673
	Social well-being	55.86	76.07	976.0	0.038
	Emotional well-being	68.91	73.73	1263.0	0.620

Among the **public-oriented** type of activity, social involvement and parish activities turned out to be differentiating but only in the scope of social well-being (Tab.3). Persons involved in social activity obtained higher average results in this dimension compared to persons that did not undertake such activity. In the case of activity connected with participation in church life, the reverse results were obtained, namely – persons actively partaking in parish activities obtained lower results on the social well-being scale compared to persons that failed to undertake such activities (the statistically significant differences obtained concerned the entire social well-being dimension, as well as two of its component dimensions – social actualisation and social integration). A statistical analysis using the Mann Whitney U test also revealed statistically significant differences between persons involved in charity projects and those that did not undertake such activities in two dimensions of personality well-being: life goal and personal development. Persons engaging in such activities on average obtained higher results on these sub-scales. Among the dimensions making up social well-being, the difference

in the compared groups was manifest in the sense of social contribution (the group of social activists obtained statistically significant, higher results).

Table 4. The differences in the sense of personality, social and emotional well-being in persons undertaking and not undertaking specific integrative activity

ACTIVITY	WELL-BEING	AVERAGE RANK		U	P
		YES	NO		
Senior Citizens' Clubs	Personality well-being	79.20	70.80	1797.5	0.289
	Social well-being	72.01	73.35	1995.5	0.866
	Emotional well-being	72.20	73.29	2002.5	0.891
Farmer's Wives' Associations	Personality well-being	47.25	73.73	179.0	0.213
	Social well-being	43.25	73.84	163.0	0.151
	Emotional well-being	49.75	73.66	189.0	0.262
Self-Help Groups	Personality well-being	77.69	72.54	797.0	0.673
	Social well-being	80.19	72.29	764.5	0.517
	Emotional well-being	77.92	72.52	794.0	0.658
Education (UTA)	Personality well-being	80.13	70.00	1886.5	0.184
	Social well-being	76.23	71.64	2054.0	0.547
	Emotional well-being	74.83	72.23	2114.5	0.734
Meetings with Friends	Personality well-being	74.29	36.80	169.0	0.050
	Social well-being	74.69	25.80	114.0	0.010
	Emotional well-being	74.21	39.20	181.0	0.067
Cafés	Personality well-being	79.84	57.31	1531.5	0.003
	Social well-being	82.04	52.24	1308.5	0.000
	Emotional well-being	78.18	61.10	1698.5	0.024

As for **integrative** activity, two types of undertaken actions were noted that statistically significantly differentiated the study groups in terms of the level of well-being. They included meeting up with friends and going to cafés/restaurants. Persons going to cafés and meeting up with their friends on average obtained higher results on the overall dimension of personality and social well-being, and in the case of persons going to cafés, the result was also higher on the emotional well-being scale compared to persons that did not partake in such activities (Tab. 4). Both these forms of activity statistically significantly differentiated the groups on the following sub-scales: social acceptance, integration, contribution and life satisfaction. In the case of persons going out to cafés and restaurants, higher results on the social actualisation and coherence dimensions as well as overall sense of happiness and life goal were recorded compared with the results obtained in the group of persons that did not do these activities.

DISCUSSION

As a result of the research, the hypothesis that a higher level of psychological well-being is experienced by persons in late adulthood that are geared towards an active lifestyle than in persons preferring a more passive lifestyle was confirmed. However, this conclusion cannot be applied to all the forms of activity because only a part of them turned out to be differentiating on the level of the respondents' well-being.

In the results obtained, particular attention should be paid to the higher level of emotional, personality and social well-being of persons that took up sports and travelling (recreational and hobby activity type). It is frequently emphasised in literature that **physical activity** is highly beneficial for the development and well-being of elderly persons (Bee, 2004; Lampinen et al., 2006; Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, 1995). This is because it was noticed that this leads to an improvement in the health condition, the overall fitness and gives rise to an increased production of endorphins (Palmore, 1979). Based on the declarations of elderly persons, they consider taking care of their own physical fitness to be linked with maintaining a positive self-esteem, a sense of environmental mastery, as well as the desire to get involved in social life (Eurostat, 2012). The results of this research seem to confirm the existence of such a relationship and further indicate a sense of happiness and life satisfaction in persons taking part in sports. Similarly, a higher level of well-being was obtained by persons that travelled, explored the world, and were open to new experiences, countering the unfavourable stereotype of a passive senior that is restricted to undertaking activity only within their own home. The research approach towards the world

seems to be a significant stimulator of development and a sense of satisfaction from one's own condition and entrepreneurship (Czerniawska, 2003; Steuden, 2011). The activities that were mentioned here involve the resources of an individual in a manner that enables them to obtain new sources of support for self-development and constitute a flexible response to the new challenges that are linked with having a greater amount of free time available. The same can be thought of the positive effect that they exert through their compensatory role.

Another type of activity that was found to comprehensively differentiate the psychological well-being of elderly persons in the presented research was **reading books** – a receptive form of activity. This result is in line with the widely discussed role of education and the popularisation of a reading culture in the mass media. The outcome of the author's own research suggests that persons who regularly read books feel happier, are more emotionally sensitive, have a sense of being more aware of the world and of being able to understand the world and the rules that govern it better than persons that are not motivated to have contact with literature. Despite reading books being classified as a receptive type of activity, it can be considered as a more interactive way of dealing with world's information than simply listening to the radio or watching television. According to the compensatory role of the undertaken actions, the fact that reaching for a book requires the determination of personal preferences and the selection of content of interest for an individual may also be significant. This may be reflected in the sense of personal development and result in better emotional functioning.

The only **integrative** type of activity which, when undertaken, differentiated the respondents in all the dimensions of well-being was going to **cafés/restaurants**. The results obtained in the social well-being dimension are particularly notable. The higher results of persons taking advantage of restaurant services, in the general dimension as well as in four out of five of the components of personality well-being (self-acceptance, personal development, life goal, environmental mastery), brings this group of respondents closer to persons that took up activities such as travelling. Using the offers and services of the travel market, culture and gastronomy can be considered as a certain skill that facilitates functioning in society and helps to draw satisfaction from living in a society. In this context, it is, perhaps, worthwhile considering the potential existing within the promotion of a „café culture” among the elderly. The opening of public space for this very age group has been the point of lengthy discussions in the media and is becoming a realistic point on the social policy agenda (e.g. the „Seventy-Plus” Municipal Aid Programme for the Elderly and Handicapped: Tea for 1 zloty). Such campaigns counteract isolation and naturally stimulate and activate this group of persons.

Interesting results were also obtained in the last type of activity left to be discussed, namely, in public-oriented activity. A differentiation only in the dimension of social well-being and in relation to two types of the following activity occurred here: **being an involved citizen and participation in parish life**. Persons working for the common good of society had higher results on the social well-being dimension than persons that did not undertake such activities, while, in the case of persons connected with the church, the opposite results were obtained. The first result seems clear and understandable, the result concerning activity linked with participation in the life of the parish, however, is surprising. This is the only statistically significant result that stands in contradiction to the activity theory, indicating that activity does not always signify well-being. Perhaps, the group of socially marginalised seniors who feel lost in contemporary reality and are looking for support, turn to the church as an institution, which goes out to meet their needs but rarely actually helps them to open up to the rest of society and to try to „tame” the external world. This kind of binding may often deepen the sense of social isolation and loss.

SUMMARY

The research carried out showed that active elderly persons achieve a higher level of psychological well-being than persons who do not partake in any activity. Furthermore, it was found that four types of activity – pursuing sports, travelling, reading books and going to cafés/restaurants are especially differentiating among the elderly in terms of the level of the three dimensions of well-being: the emotional, social and personality well-being.

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