

# Spending leisure time and activities in the third period of life

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## Abstract

In 2006, a study of leisure time activities of women aged over 65 was carried out in the Kamnik and Domžale. Twenty-six women from Kamnik and six women from Domžale, aged 69.68 on average, were included in the research. The research was repeated in the year 2011. Twenty women from the same group still actively participated four years later, now aged 74.35 on average. The participants of the research dedicated most of their leisure time to gardening, watching TV, reading and meeting relatives and friends. Regarding sports activities, most of the women focused on hiking and going for walks, cycling, mountaineering, swimming, dancing, sleighing, alpine skiing, doing exercises at home and general exercising. The aim of the research was to determine the preferences of activities of women over sixty-five years of age and to highlight the possibilities of including these women into various social and recreational activities in the local environment, for example within the framework of senior citizens' associations or other forms of social and adult day-care centres.

**KEYWORDS:** elderly, women, social inclusion, spending leisure time, sports and recreational activities

## Introduction

The definition of old age is changing. One of the most popular expressions has become the newly coined *active aging*, which represents a contrast to viewing to old age as a dependent and passive period of one's life. The World Health Organization (WHO 2001) defines active aging as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and safety, in order to improve the quality of life of the elderly. Active aging refers to the ability of aging people to live socially and economically productive lives. Active aging can be understood, in the broadest sense, as a continuous involvement of the elderly in social, economic, cultural and civilian areas, and not only as intensified physical activities of the elderly or as their brain fitness and prolongation of employment (Kuhar 2007).

In the third period of life, being involved in a variety of activities in leisure time is significantly more affected by subjective than objective factors, because old age itself, the desire to be engaged in leisure time activities, family situation, vicinity of home and financial situation are of great importance. Fox (1992) states that self-confidence also plays an important role as it is an indicator of psychological well-being and engagement in leisure time activities. For many people, engagement in different activities means active spending of leisure time and a social life in which the primary criterion is welfare. The interests of an individual (Marentič-Požarnik 2000) are, in fact, permanent positive orientations towards individual areas that begin to develop in early childhood and are a part of dynamic characteristics of the individual.

It is interesting that in leisure and sports activities the elderly much more prefer to socialize in age-heterogeneous groups where dynamism, diversity and different experiences of participants surface (McGuire 1985). The research among individuals aged from seventy-four to eighty-five (Dorgo et al. 2009) showed that, in seventy per cent of cases, mentors and instructors of the activities also play an important role as well as accessibility, type of training, payment, marital status (married, unmarried), family situation and health condition (Cohen-Mansfield et al. 2004). Stiggebout and others (2008) argue that primarily younger individuals are engaged in organized sports; walking and exercising are more interesting for women, while men are more interested in skating and table tennis. Badminton and cycling have attracted individuals with relatively higher education; in contrast, less-educated participants have been particularly interested in general exercising. Biking, walking, swimming and gardening are the most popular activities among senior citizens.

In Slovenia, the motivating factor for participation in individual sports sectors are different competitions that are organized by senior citizens' associations at the local as well as state levels. Both women and men participate in matches such as air-gun shooting, bowling, bocce and darts. Men compete in chess and fishing with a float switch (Tomšič 2010). Among popular social activities in Slovenia, there are organized activities for relaxation and recreation such as hiking, mountain climbing and swimming, chess competitions, running camps, kayaking, biking and cycling marathons.

The social role of the elderly will be even more important due to the changes in society (Voljč 2007). Healthy aging is not limited only to the period of old age because a body ages throughout the whole of life; its leverage should be sought since birth, through childhood, adolescence, adulthood and in old age itself. Aging is associated with significant social and health shocks, but taking into consideration the ethical values of health and understanding oneself, other people and society, it is possible to live a healthy, active and spiritually rich life in the period of old age. An appropriate attitude towards approaching death is also important. Life can be designed and enriched to the last, although no one knows how long he will live. Regardless of the former, the objective of healthy aging is for everyone to remain physically and socially active as long as possible, autonomous and independent, but emotionally connected to the surroundings. Ramovš (2006) states that optional socializing and making acquaintances with peers is very important. The physical and emotional needs of older generation are no different than the same needs of the

middle-aged generation, only that it is more difficult to implement them in old age period. The older generation wishes primarily to socialize with their family members; they are particularly happy to socialize with their grandchildren: so much so that they are ready to sacrifice whatever necessary for them. The worst that can happen is if the elderly shut themselves away and surrender to solitude. Voljč (2007) believes that it is very important that all those we are closely related as well as people in general should have the same possibilities to develop a healthy lifestyle; thereby, we will contribute to the health of Slovenian society and society in a wider perspective.

## **Research objectives**

The objectives of the research were to examine the spending of leisure time and sports and recreational activities at the elderly female population, aged over sixty-five years. We were interested in which were the most current leisure and sports and recreational activities among women aged over sixty-five years, and whether they are linked to employment in domestic environment, and whether they include also the activities outside home and in the societies from in the local community.

## **Methodology**

Thirty-two women were included in the research in the years 2006/07, aged over sixty-five years, from Kamnik and Domžale as well as the surrounding area. On average, they were 69.68 years old (birth years from 1930 to 1942). Their participation was voluntary. In June 2011, the survey was repeated. From the original group, twenty participants (62.5%) decided to participate again, but this time the average age was 74.35 years.

To determine the leisure and sports and recreational activities, a questionnaire on the subjective assessment of physical activity at the elderly was used (A physical activity questionnaire for the elderly; Voorrips et al. 1991). Female participants of the research identified the activities in which they were engaged; we were further interested in how many hours per week they dedicated to all activities and how many hours per week they dedicated to individual activities.

For statistical analysis, the program SPSS 16.0 was used (SPSS Inc., IBM Corporation, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2008). The results were presented in the forms of tables and a text. All statistical differences were examined at five-per cent risk ( $p = 0.05$ ). The per centage of participation of women in individual activities was calculated and the comparison of the five-year period with the  $\chi^2$  test was carried out.

## **Results**

Spending of leisure time and participation in sports and recreational activities of the female population aged over sixty-five were related to the rhythm of activities in the domestic environment, which were dictated by the environment in which they lived and self-motivation, to wit, a desire to participate in a particular leisure time and sports and recreational activities.

*Table 1: Hours per week spent for leisure time and sports and recreational activities in the years 2006/07 and 2011.*

Number of hours per week	Leisure time		Sports and recreational activities	
	2006/07 %	2011 %	2006/07 %	2011 %
0–5	-	10.0	35.0	30.0
6–10	15.0	30.0	20.0	35.0
11–15	20.0	15.0	15.0	25.0
16–20	5.0	10.0	15.0	10.0
21–25	10.0	15.0	5.0	-
26–30	20.0	5.0	5.0	-
31–35	10.0	-	-	-
36–40	10.0	5.0	-	-
over 40	10.0	10.0	5.0	-
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100	100
$\bar{x}$	25.3	18.3	12.4	8.9

The comparison of the total amount of hours spent for leisure time and sports and recreational activities per week in the years 2006/07 and in the year 2011 for female participants of the research is shown in Table 2. In 2006/07, fifteen per cent of female participants were engaged in various leisure time activities from six to ten hours, twenty per cent of female participants from eleven to fifteen hours or twenty-six to thirty hours, only a small number of them were engaged in activities over thirty hours; in 2011, thirty per cent of female participants were engaged in activities from six to ten hours, fifteen per cent from eleven to fifteen or from twenty-one to twenty-five hours; very few of them dedicated over thirty-five hours per week to leisure time activities.

Previously, the average number of hours of a weekly load for the female participants was 25.3 hours, or 3.6 hours per day; but in 2011 the average number of hours devoted to various activities was at 18.3 hours per week or 2.6 hours per day. Thirty-five per cent of female participants were actively involved in sports and recreational activities to five hours per week in 2006/07 and thirty per cent in 2011; in 2006/07, twenty per cent of them were engaged from six to ten hours, and in 2011 thirty-five per cent; in 2006/07, fifteen per cent of them participated from eleven to fifteen hours and in 2011 twenty-five per cent did; in 2006/07, fifteen per cent of women participated in sports and recreational activities from sixteen to twenty hours per week and in 2011 only ten per cent did; very few devoted more than twenty hours per week to such activities. In 2006/07, the average number of hours of a weekly load was 12.4 hours for the research participants, i.e. 1.8 hours per day, but in the 2011, the average number of hours was at 8.9, i.e. 1.3 hours per day.

Table 2: Spending leisure time according to the activities in the years 2006/07 and 2011

Activity	Yrs	Hours per week								$\chi^2$	p
		zero or less than 1		1–4 hours		5–8 hours		more than 8 hours			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Gardening</b>	V1	5	25.0	12	60.0	2	10.0	1	5.0	4.869	0.772
	V2	4	20.0	12	60.0	4	20.0	-	-		
<b>Babysitting grandchildren</b>	V1	11	55.0	7	35.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	3.360	0.762
	V2	14	70.0	4	20.0	2	10.0	-	-		
<b>Reading</b>	V1	3	15.0	10	50.0	6	30.0	1	5.0	5.967	0.651
	V2	5	25.0	10	50.0	5	25.0	-	-		
<b>Watching TV</b>	V1	-	-	10	50.0	6	30.0	4	20.0	14.869	0.189
	V2	3	15.0	11	55.0	4	20.0	2	10.0		
<b>Cinema, concert, theatre</b>	V1	12	60.0	8	40.0	-	-	-	-	3.373	0.497
	V2	13	65.0	7	35.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Handicraft</b>	V1	6	30.0	12	60.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	16.312	0.042
	V2	13	65.0	7	35.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Education</b>	V1	11	55.0	8	40.0	1	5.0	-	-	3.568	0.468
	V2	15	75.0	5	25.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Friends &amp; relatives</b>	V1	3	15.0	12	60.0	3	15.0	2	10.0	4.644	0.795
	V2	5	25.0	13	65.0	2	10.0	-	-		
<b>Work in societies</b>	V1	10	50.0	9	45.0	-	-	1	5.0	8.534	0.02
	V2	13	65.0	6	30.0	1	5.0	-	-		
<b>Confectionaries &amp; restaurants</b>	V1	13	65.0	7	35.0	-	-	-	-	4.148	0.386
	V2	14	70.0	5	25.0	1	5.0	-	-		
<b>Cultural activities</b>	V1	13	65.0	6	30.0	1	5.0	-	-	3.429	0.330
	V2	15	75.0	5	25.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Part-time job</b>	V1	15	75.0	3	15.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	6.234	0.513
	V2	14	70.0	4	20.0	2	10.0	-	-		
<b>Resting</b>	V1	12	60.0	7	35.0	1	5.0	-	-	3.111	0.539
	V2	12	60.0	8	40.0	-	-	-	-		

Legend: N – Number,  $\chi^2$ - Chi square test, V1 – year 2006/07, V2 – year 2011, % - per centage, p - statistical significance

The comparison of how the female participants who were involved in the research in 2006/07 and 2011 spend their leisure time, shown in Table 2, reveals statistically important differences from the four-year period only in handicrafts ( $p=0.042$ ). Previously, seventy per cent of the female participants of the research were engaged in handicrafts, but in 2011 only thirty-five per cent were. In the weekly spending of leisure time for other activities, the differences from the four-year period were not statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ).

In 2006/07, the female participants from the research spent most of the time gardening (84.4%), watching TV (100%), reading (90.6%) and meeting relatives and friends (90.6%); in 2011, they spent maximum hours for gardening (80.0%), watching TV (85.0%), reading (75.0%) and visiting friends and relatives (75.0%). Only a third of

them were constantly involved in association and cultural activities, babysitting of grandchildren, part-time work and handicrafts, visiting the theatre or cinema and education.

Table 3: Sports and recreational activities in the years 2006/07 and 2011

Activity	Yrs	Hours per week								$\chi^2$	p
		zero or less than 1		1-4 hours		5-8 hours		more than 8 hours			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Aerobics</b>	V1	18	90.0	2	10.0	-	-	-	-	4.000	0.261
	V2	18	90.0	2	10.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Fitness</b>	V1	18	90.0	2	10.0	-	-	-	-	2.105	0.147
	V2	20	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-		
<b>Cycling</b>	V1	12	60.0	6	30.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	8.133	0.321
	V2	12	60.0	7	35.0	1	5.0	-	-		
<b>Fast running</b>	V1	18	90.0	2	10.0	-	-	-	-	0.360	0.548
	V2	19	95.0	1	5.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Slow running</b>	V1	16	80.0	4	20.0	-	-	-	-	2.667	0.446
	V2	16	80.0	3	15.0	1	5.0	-	-		
<b>Fast walking</b>	V1	12	60.0	7	35.0	1	5.0	-	-	6.182	0.519
	V2	10	50.0	8	40.0	2	10.0	-	-		
<b>Slow walking</b>	V1	9	45.0	7	35.0	4	20.0	-	-	7.386	0.496
	V2	10	50.0	7	35.0	3	15.0	-	-		
<b>Mountaineering</b>	V1	9	45.0	8	40.0	3	15.0	-	-	3.896	0.564
	V2	14	70.0	5	25.0	1	5.0	-	-		
<b>Nature walk</b>	V1	1	5.0	13	65.0	4	20.0	2	10.0	10.286	0.328
	V2	4	20.0	9	45.0	7	35.0	-	-		
<b>Swimming</b>	V1	13	65.0	6	30.0	-	-	1	5.0	4.473	0.215
	V2	18	90.0	2	10.0	-	-	-	-		
<b>Dancing</b>	V1	19	95.0	1	5.0	-	-	-	-	1.026	0.311
	V2	20	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-		
<b>Yoga</b>	V1	19	95.0	1	5.0	-	-	-	-	1.026	0.311
	V2	20	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-		
<b>Alpine skiing</b>	V1	19	95.0	1	5.0	-	-	-	-	1.026	0.311
	V2	20	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-		

Legend: N – Number,  $\chi^2$ - Chi square test, V1 – year 2006/07, V2 – year 2011, % - per centage, p - statistical significance

The comparison of involvement in sports and recreational activities of the female participants who were included in the research in 2006/07 and 2011 is shown in Table 3. The comparison does not show statistically significant differences in the four-year period in any of the activities ( $p > 0.05$ ). All these years, the female participants in the research were mainly involved in slow and fast walking, nature walks, cycling, slow running, swimming and mountaineering.

Among sports and recreational activities in 2006/07, nature walks were in the foreground with more than three quarters of female participants, with half of them mountaineering and slow walking; slightly fewer than a half fast walking and cycling; and a slightly more than a third swimming, and fewer slow running, fitness, dancing or other sports and recreational activities. In 2011, more than three quarters of female participants still spent most hours walking in nature, one half of them was involved in slow and fast walking, one third in cycling and mountaineering, and one fifth in slow running, fewer still in swimming, aerobics and fast running.

## **Discussion**

Thirty-two women from Kamnik (81.2%) and Domžale (18.8%), sixty-five or more years old, were monitored in the research. At the beginning of the research, in 2006/07, the average age of the female participants was 69.68 years; at the end of the research, in 2011, the average age was 74.35 years. With the help of a questionnaire on the subjective assessment of physical activities of the elderly, we determined the preferences of female participants of the research for sports and recreational activities and leisure activities.

Among retired people, cycling, walking and swimming appear to be the most popular activities (Stiggelbout et al. 2008). Previously and in 2011, our female participants were involved mostly in walking in nature: ninety-five per cent in 2006/06 and eighty per cent in 2011; slow walking: fifty-five per cent in 2006/07 and fifty per cent in 2011; mountaineering: fifty-five per cent in 2006/07 and thirty per cent in 2011; cycling: forty per cent in 2006/07 and the same per centage in 2011; fast walking: forty per cent in 2006/07 and fifty per cent in 2011 and swimming: thirty-five per cent in 2006/07 and ten per cent in 2011, but less in aerobics, fitness, dancing, yoga, fast running and alpine skiing.

With regards to sports activities, it is generally considered that the female population (Sila 2004) in Slovenia is most frequently engaged in activities such as walking and strolling twenty-seven per cent, swimming twenty per cent, cycling eighteen per cent, mountaineering fourteen per cent, aerobics twelve per cent, dancing twelve per cent, morning gymnastics twelve per cent, badminton ten per cent, running nine per cent and alpine skiing eight per cent. The abovementioned preferences of sports and recreational activities could be an indicator for different sports and Senior Citizens' Societies in local communities and wider, to offer sports and recreational activities which would be accessible and suitable for the over sixty-five generation, under the assumption that the activities are financially accessible to the generation in the third period of their life. The analysis about spending leisure time has shown that for the majority of the female participants of the research, spending leisure time implied an active participation in a variety of household tasks and cultural events, work in societies and other employments.

The proportion of participants of the research who spent time watching TV was one hundred per cent in 2006/07 and eighty-five per cent in 2011; gardening seventy-five per cent in 2006/07 and eighty per cent in 2011; reading and meeting friends and relatives eighty-five per cent in 2006/07 and seventy-five per cent in 2011; seventy per cent in 2006/07 and thirty-five per cent in 2011 were engaged in handicrafts; working in

societies fifty per cent in 2006/07 and thirty-five per cent in 2011; education forty-five per cent in 2006/07 and twenty-five per cent in 2011; visiting cultural events forty per cent in 2006/07 and thirty-five per cent in 2011; cultural activities thirty-five per cent in 2006/07 and twenty-five per cent in 2011) and babysitting grandchildren forty-five per cent in 2006/07 and thirty per cent in 2011.

Furthermore, Australian research, performed among 3955 women aged from seventy-five to eighty-one, revealed that the older population of women actively participates in activities such as gardening, hand-crafts, reading (7%), cooking and listening to music (4.5%). As many as 20.1% of participants are engaged in voluntary work and 13.5% are active in different societies (Adamson & Parker 2006).

The Canadian research on the influence of leisure time activities on health of older women in Montreal has revealed that leisure time activities can improve the physical health, prevent the occurrence of chronic diseases and have a positive impact on the quality of life (Fitzpatrick 2009). Leisure time could also represent dealing with less serious activities, pleasure, enthusiasm, opportunity and other energy, as leisure time activities are at the same time stimulating and reassuring, they could be extremely active or passive (Ebersole & Hess 1995).

Hereinafter, we note that the number of hours that the participants of the research spent for leisure time and sports and recreational activities during the five-year long project was reduced by twenty-eight per cent for leisure time activities as well as sports and recreational activities. We assume that the decrease of weekly activities is owed to a higher average age and, consequently, related lower motivation or a wish for activities at home or within the local community, even though, on average, the weekly number of hours of rest at the participants of the research was reduced in this period.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this research, which included women aged over sixty-five who live at home, could be a guide for a variety of opportunities about spending leisure time and sports and recreational activities and should be transferred also into institutions, such as retirement homes and municipal day-care centres. For the elderly, participation in a variety of leisure time and sports and recreational activities is very important because such activities enable the maintenance of physical health, have a positive impact on mental health and have in all respects a positive impact on well-being, and thereby raise the quality of life. It is very important for senior citizens to know that they are still important and that they can contribute to active life in the neighbourhood or wider, in the local community, e.g. in societies and clubs. Due to the fact that more than eighty per cent of the interviewed older women who still live in their home environment prefer gardening, each senior citizen living in a home for the elderly could have potted plants, if not a mini flower bed or a small garden with decorative plants or a herb garden to take care of.

As many as one third of the interviewees who still live in their home environment were continuously involved in the association-related and cultural activities, babysitting grandchildren, handicrafts, visiting theatres or cinemas and education. Therefore, to main-



tain the quality of living as well as active involvement of the elderly in homes, the following activities can be of interest: dancing and music workshops, drama clubs, reading hours and animation of the stories read, handicrafts workshops, meetings of singers in order to preserve folk songs, connections with kindergartens and schools in the activities in the form of intergenerational association, social sports activities (bowling, walks, social games, etc.), integrations in the preparation of breakfast or snacks or baking cakes and pastries.

Last but not least, sociological theories on aging also remind us that cognitive and emotional functions reflect a desire to maintain productivity, independence and, of course, an active interaction with the environment. With the awareness of and growing concern for an environment in which everybody can contribute a little to the common welfare, such forms of participation are especially important in terms of transfer of knowledge, skills and arts from the older generation to the younger one.

We are aware that the activities should be adjusted to the individual's skills and capabilities as well as to their needs for participation. At the same time, we should not ignore the impact of the participants of the activities on other users, who can participate only passively at the beginning, maybe with their ideas, but gradually they can become enthusiastic about the offered activities and start being actively involved. With a little good will, practically everyone could participate in the suggested activities: the employees who could adjust their work schedule, within which much could be upgraded, the service users and also volunteers, who are more and more numerous each year as the awareness of voluntarism is spreading into all social spheres.

With the results of our research, we want to contribute to the possibility that the broadest possible circle of society and relevant institutions, that relatively healthy and active population of the elderly, of both sexes and sixty-five years old and more, which are in contact with Senior Citizens' Associations, Universities for the Third Period of Life, clubs, health centres and homes for the elderly, would start to consider systematically implementing different activities to preserve an individual's autonomy, independence and good physical health, which is particularly important given the fact that life expectancy has been increasing. All this can also have an impact on a decrease in medical treatment costs and, most importantly, on the general satisfaction of the elderly with their being fit, remaining fully active, important and socially involved. The former could be expressed with the slogan: 'All roads lead to an active, smiling and happy older person in society, with and among us.'

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## **Povzetek**

V letu 2006 smo v Občinah Kamnik in Domžale izvedli raziskavo o preživljanju prostega časa žensk, starejših nad 65 let. V raziskavo je bilo vključenih 26 žensk iz Kamnika in 6 žensk iz Domžal s povprečno starostjo 69,68 let. Raziskavo smo ponovili leta 2011, kjer je po štirih letih še vedno aktivno sodelovalo 20 žensk iste skupine s povprečno starostjo 74,35 let. Največ prostega časa so udeleženke raziskave namenile vrtnarjenju, gledanju televizije, branju ter srečanjem s sorodniki in prijatelji, med športno rekreativnimi panogami pa so bili v ospredju hoja in sprehodi, cestno kolesarstvo, planinstvo, vadba doma, plavanje, družabni ples, sankanje, drsanje, alpsko smučanje in splošna vadba. Namen raziskave je bil ugotoviti preference o vrstah aktivnosti ter osvetliti možnosti za vključevanje starejših žensk nad 65 let v družabne in rekreativne aktivnosti v lokalnem okolju, tako v društvih upokojencev, kot tudi drugih oblikah socialnega vključevanja in dnevnega varstva.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** starejši, ženske, socialna vključenost, prostočasne aktivnosti, športno rekreativne aktivnosti.

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