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## **Old age crises and recreational activity of seniors before and during the crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland**

### **Abstract**

The current aging of societies is an important issue that directly affects the functioning of families, groups and entire societies. The issue of the health of an aging society has become particularly important during the pandemic crisis. Therefore, physical activity is of great importance for health and well-being. There are various forms of activity addressed to seniors.

The aim of the presented article is to show the role of various forms and types of recreational activity of the elderly in the aspect of emerging crises of old age before and during the pandemic (COVID-19) based on own research. The results of the empirical research showed that the forms of recreational activity of seniors before and during the pandemic were influenced by factors such as age, place of residence, education and financial situation. It is expected that the results of these studies will contribute both theoretically and practically to the assessment of the decision-making capacity of older people in the field of recreational activity, thus counteracting the crisis of old age.

In the characteristics of the researched topic, the method of analyzing the literature on the subject, the method of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire and the method of statistical analysis were used.

**Keywords:** old age crises, recreational activity, pandemic crisis

### **Introduction**

A person's lifestyle, including his health behaviors, change throughout his life. These changes are related to age, gender, personality traits, health, social roles and changing environmental factors<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Woźniak, I. Brukwicka, Z. Kopańska, R. Kollar, M. Kollarorova, B. Bajger, *Związki stylu życia ze zdrowiem*, „Jornal of Clinical Healthcare” 2015, nr 4, s. 4-6.

Restrictions imposed during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic had a particularly negative impact on the well-being of senior citizens. Total or partial isolation and belonging to a high-risk group due to age deprived elderly people of opportunities to maintain their everyday activity levels. They no longer received visits from their families, friends, or colleagues, they did even have the possibility of going to church or even for a walk. All this led to a significant drop in their physical activity levels, increased fatigue, poor mental condition. The protractedness of the pandemic period and its long-term, negative impact on health may also be associated with more distant consequences, and the health crisis has a negative impact on the well-being of individuals, groups and entire societies<sup>2</sup>.

The study on recreational activity of the elderly gained particular importance, among others, due to restrictions during the pandemic, and because it is an interesting research area, enabling comparison of results from the periods during the pandemic and before the pandemic.

Following the introduction, this paper is divided into four parts. In the first part, theoretical aspects concerning the elderly and recreational activity are explored. The second discusses the study design, while the third presents the results of our investigations before the pandemic (in 2019) and during the pandemic (in 2020 and 2021); this is followed by a discussion. The final part of the paper contains a summary of the findings and conclusions.

## **The essence of the crisis and recreational activity of the elderly**

The prolongation of human life has caused that, both worldwide and in Poland, issues related to people at old age have become the subject of research by many sciences, both in the theoretical and practical dimension. Poland, and most European countries, is a “graying” country – there are more and more people over 60 in our society<sup>3</sup>. The end of professional activity is associated with an increase

<sup>2</sup> J. Kuriańska-Wołoszyn, A. Wołoszyn, *Zmiany wybranych zachowań zdrowotnych kobiet czynnych zawodowo, jakie zaszły w trakcie trwania pandemii COVID-19*, [w:] *Post hominum memoriam. Księga pamiątkowa poświęcona profesorowi Tadeuszowi Rynkiewiczowi*, red. E. Skorupska-Raczyńska, A. Wołoszyn, Gorzów Wielkopolski, 2022, s. 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> E. Kozdroń, *Programy aktywności ruchowej w profilaktyce pomyślnego starzenia się*, [w:] *Antropologia w obliczu starzejącego się społeczeństwa – biologiczne przejawy procesów*

in the amount of free time that should be used constructively. Retirement of an elderly person is associated with a lowering of his/her economic and social status. Social roles are changing<sup>4</sup>. Various experiences and experiences of the elderly may influence the emergence of multidimensional crises. According to S. Steuden, the difficulties of senior age include e.g. financial problems resulting from technical and civilization progress, complicated family relationships, low self-esteem, lack of self-acceptance<sup>5</sup>. W. Wnuk, on the other hand, also points to problems that require something new – learning to use a computer, an ATM, establishing contact with a support group, problems related to one's own feelings, i.e. lack of tolerance, aggression resulting from health defects, fear of death<sup>6</sup>. The above problems may be related to crisis situations experienced by an elderly person. J. Wawrzyniak indicates the deterioration of physical fitness and health, adult children moving out of home, the loss of family and loved ones, the end of professional activity and retirement<sup>7</sup>. In the literature on the subject, crises that affect the elderly concern the following issues:

- emotional plane;
- biological area;
- cognitive level;
- changes in the person's behavior (isolation from other people, inconsistent behavior, illogical statements, obstacles in social life and fulfilling social roles)<sup>8</sup>.

Activity is of great importance in overcoming crises and problems, which contributes to maintaining proper health and fitness of the elderly. Activity

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*starzenia się*, red. M. Łopuszyńska-Dawid, A. Kopiczko, J. Chrzanowska, Warszawa 2021, s. 5.

<sup>4</sup> K. Białożył, *Produktywność osób starszych – czy produktywny jest tylko aktywny zawodowo senior?*, [w:] *Marginalizacja rynku pracy: teorie i implikacje praktyczne*, red. N. G. Piłkuła, Kraków, 2014, s. 87-102.

<sup>5</sup> S. Steuden, *Psychologia starzenia się starości*, Warszawa 2023, s. 41-45.

<sup>6</sup> W. Wnuk, *Różne obszary opieki nad ludźmi starszymi. Implikacje edukacyjne*. [w:] *Nauczyciel andragog w społeczeństwie wiedzy*, red. W. Horyń, J. Maciejewski, Wrocław, 2007, s. 48-49.

<sup>7</sup> J. Wawrzyniak, *Starość i starzenie się*. [w:] *Starzenie się i starość w perspektywie pracy socjalnej*. red. A. Chabior, A. Fabiś, J. K. Wawrzyniak, Warszawa 2014, s. 26-29.

<sup>8</sup> B. Szatur-Jaworska, P. Błędowski, M. Dziegielewska, *Podstawy gerontologii społecznej. ASPRA JR*, Warszawa, 2006 s. 164-165.

contributes to the development of an individual, their interests, as well as maintaining and developing contacts with the environment<sup>9</sup>.

Recreation plays a special role in the activity of seniors. The term “recreation” is derived from the Latin word *recreo* referring to revitalization, revival, invigoration, or restoration. In contemporary literature, there are various but close definitions of recreation. According to R. Winiarski, recreation is a set of behaviors undertaken outside professional, family and social duties. Their purpose is to provide recreation, entertainment and psychosocial development of a human being. According to T. Wolańska, recreation is a variety of activities undertaken in free time, voluntarily, for pleasure, self-expression, formation of one’s own personality, renewal and multiplication of psychophysical strength. As I. Kielbasiewicz-Drozdowska writes, “in the modern sense, recreation means generally all forms of activity undertaken in free time, i.e. the time that remains after performing the necessary activities related to professional work, family and social life”<sup>10</sup>.

In literature and in practice, a two-part division of recreation into active and passive activity of a participant in recreational behavior is common. The division of recreation into active (active, physical) and passive is simplified, stereotypical and incomplete. On its basis, it is difficult to assess the degree of active participation of a given person in recreational activities. Therefore, in the literature on the subject, a different division is also used:

- physical recreation – comprising all forms of human physical activity (e.g. walks, sports games and activities, physical exercises, traveling);
- creative recreation – shapes the personality of the individual, affects the emotional sphere, imagination (its forms including art, theater, photography, music, hobbies);
- cultural and entertainment recreation – includes such forms as reading, mental entertainment, social games, meetings with interesting people;

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<sup>9</sup> A. Chabior, *Rola aktywności kulturalno-oświatowej w adaptacji do starości*, Radom–Kielce, 2000, s. 59.

<sup>10</sup> A. Wartecka-Ważyńska, S. Ren, I. Wyszowska, *Recreational activities of the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland: social and economic determinants*, „Gerontologia Polska” 2023:31, 108-117, s. 109-110.

- social recreation – voluntary activity undertaken in one's leisure time for other people's benefit (e.g. volunteering, organizing meetings, performances, concerts<sup>11</sup>).

In the conducted research on the recreational activity of seniors, the following were taken into account: the budget of free time in the week, forms and organizers of recreational activity, average monthly expenses and ways of implementing recreational activity. These issues were correlated with age, place of residence of the surveyed seniors, their education and financial situation.

## **2. Research methodology and characteristics of the surveyed people**

Due to the aging of the society, the initiatives undertaken and this empirical research are focused on the 50+ age group (with a predominance of 60+ people). The growing interest in this issue shows a deep awareness of the importance of aging and, therefore, the need to meet the problems and needs associated with it.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic that affected mankind in 2020, the authors decided to carry out research at this difficult time, which aimed to compare the economic and social conditions of seniors' recreational activity before and during the pandemic.

The aim of the empirical research was to verify the degree of recreational activity of seniors over 50 and to learn of its social and economic conditions.

Recreational activities of the elderly are very diverse. The authors of the article assumed that the important factors influencing this activity are undoubtedly psychosocial and economic conditions. These conditions may or may not be conducive to the activity being studied and thus may or may not be conducive to successful ageing. The article poses research questions regarding free time, organizers, forms and ways of implementing recreational activity. Providing the answer involved conducting empirical research in which appropriate methods and research techniques were used.

In the study, the diagnostic survey method was used, in which the technique of survey research with the use of an auditorium questionnaire was used. The survey

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<sup>11</sup> A. Wartecka-Ważyńska, I. Wyszowska, *Aktywność rekreacyjna i turystyczna kobiet w wieku 50+ oraz jej uwarunkowania. Analiza wyników badań*, Poznań 2020.

contained closed, open and semi-open questions, which were completed by the respondents in the presence of the interviewer. The respondents were selected the interviewers from among families and friends, as well as from students of the University of the Third Age and participants of community centers.

In total, 269 people completed the survey (146 before the pandemic; 123 during the pandemic<sup>12</sup>). The first part of the research was carried out in the period from October to November 2019 in Poznań and the Poznań district (hereinafter: the Poznań group), and the second part – in the period from November 2021 to January 2022 in the area of Gorzów and in the Gorzów district (hereinafter: the Gorzów group). In addition, as part of the research methodology, unstructured interviews and direct observation were used. An analysis of the literature on the subject and the method of descriptive statistics analysis were also used<sup>13</sup>.

It should be emphasized that only women participated in the first study, whilst in the second research both women (73.2%) and men (26.8%). The age characteristics of the surveyed group are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondents' age in the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups

Category	Pre-pandemic group	Pandemic group
	%	%
Total	100.0	100.0
50–54	5.5	14.0
55–59	17.8	23.1
60 and over	74.7	62.8
No data	2.1	-

Source: own study.

When analyzing the age structure of the pre-pandemic sample, it should be noted that 23.3% were respondents aged 50-59, and 74.7% aged 60 and more. The average age of the surveyed women is 67.4 years. The women of the second age group are more frequent participants of meetings in institutions whose offer is addressed to seniors, hence their large participation in the research. However,

<sup>12</sup> Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań w czasie kryzysu pandemii w węższym zakresie zostały przedstawione w: A. Wartecka-Ważnyńska, S. Ren, I. Wyszowska, *Recreational activities of the elderly*, op. cit., s. 108-117.

<sup>13</sup> H. Januszek, J. Sikora *Podstawy socjologii, wydanie szóste rozszerzone*, Poznań 2012, s. 147-155.

the largest quota is recorded by people over 60, which results from the increased amount of time they can have free from professional duties (Table 1).

A similar situation is observed in the second group of respondents, where the largest percentage (62.8%) are also people in their sixties (tab. 1).

Education as a socio-demographic feature of the respondents is illustrated by the data in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Respondents' residence in the pre-pandemic and pandemic groups

Category	Pre-pandemic group	Pandemic group
	%	%
Total	100.0	100.0
Rural	4.1	6.7
Urban (below 50,000 residents)	14.4	17.5
Urban (between 51,000 and 100,000 residents)	8.9	22.5
Urban (over 101,000 residents)	58.2	53.3
No data	14.4	-

Source: own study.

The study of the structure of education of the elderly before the pandemic showed that the largest number of respondents have a high school certificate, as much as 50.7%, followed by a university diploma – 33.6%, whilst 11.6% of the surveyed women graduated from primary and vocational school.

The education of the respondents questioned during the pandemic shows a surprising balance – there were groups with an equal percentage (41.5%) of both university and secondary education. Much fewer people declared basic vocational (12.2%) or primary (5.8%) education (Table 2).

An important determinant of the participation of senior citizens in recreation is the financial status of the respondents, which generates certain related costs. The “Poznań” group (45.2%) of the respondents described their current financial situation as very good and good; 52.0% as average and 1.4% as bad and very bad. In the “Gorzów” group, more than half (50.6%) of the respondents declared an average financial situation, followed by a group with a good situation (32.8%). Very good, however, was indicated by a small percentage of respondents (8.2%), similarly to the situation described as bad was indicated by 8.2%.

### 3. Research results before and during the pandemic

In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, among the factors determining the recreational activity of the surveyed women was free time and its amount, which in turn varies due to demographic, social and economic characteristics.

Variation in the amount of free time depending on age, education, place of residence and financial situation of women aged 50+ is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Weekly amount of leisure time by age, residence, education, financial situation of respondents in 2019 (pre-pandemic) and during the pandemic (2020-2021)

Category		1–2 hours		3–4 hours		5 and more hours		No data		In total	
		2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21
Age (years)	50–59	5,9	24,4	17,6	29,3	58,8	46,3	17,6	0,0	100,0	100,0
	60 and over	7,3	16,0	18,3	25,3	61,5	58,7	12,8	0,0	100,0	100,0
Residence (Population in thousands)	up to 50	7,4	37,5	11,1	18,7	59,3	43,7	22,2	0,0	100,0	100,0
	51–100	7,7	35,7	23,1	42,9	69,2	21,4	0,0	0,0	100,0	100,0
	101 and over	7,1	17,5	20,01	20,6	63,5	61,9	9,4	0,0	100,0	100,0
	No data	4,8	0,0	33,3	0,0	38,1	0,0	23,8	0,0	100,0	0,0
Education	Primary/ vocational	5,9	36,8	17,6	26,4	58,8	36,8	17,6	0,0	100,0	100,0
	High school	5,4	20,4	20,3	24,5	63,5	55,1	10,8	0,0	100,0	100,0
	College/ university	10,2	10,4	18,4	29,2	59,2	60,4	12,2	0,0	100,0	100,0
Financial situation	Very good or good	7,6	9,8	16,7	31,7	65,2	58,5	10,6	0,0	100,0	100,0
	Average	6,6	25,0	25,0	18,3	53,9	56,7	14,5	0,0	100,0	100,0

Source: own study.

The analysis of the data contained in Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between the age of the surveyed women and the weekly amount of leisure time of more than 5 hours. Respondents aged 50-59 and 60 or more had more than 5 hours of free time a week. The situation regarding the amount of leisure time in the range of 3-4 hours a week is similar, but much lower. The situation is similar with regard to the place of residence of the surveyed women and the amount of free time per week. Women who lived in large towns, i.e. 51-100 thousand inhabitants and in cities (population over 101,000) had the most free time.



Correlations between the education of women aged 50+ and their weekly amount of leisure time were also analyzed. The research shows that there is no significant difference between the education of women aged 50+ and the amount of free time per week of more than 5 hours.

The data in Table 3 shows that women who had 5 or more hours of free time a week reported a very good and good financial situation (65.2%). In turn, the respondents with 3-4 hours of leisure time a week had an average financial situation (25.0%). Therefore, it can be assumed that the financial situation was a significant factor determining the recreational activity of women aged 50+, which may result from the rising prices on the market of recreational services operating on purely commercial services<sup>14</sup>.

In contrast, basing on statistical calculations included in Table 3, it can be concluded that the weekly amount of leisure time (over 5 hours) was held by people over 60 (almost 59%), with the possibility of using it for recreational activity. The weekly amount of leisure time from 3 to 4 hours was indicated by people up to 60 years of age (about 30%).

Respondents living in a city of more than 101,000 inhabitants (approx. 62%) and those from towns of up to 50,000 inhabitants (approx. 44%) had the greatest amount of leisure time in a week. Conversely, the smallest amount of free time per week (1-2 hours) was pointed by respondents living in the largest towns (about 17%). The differentiation in the amount of free time regarding the respondents' education indicates that there is no significant difference between the education of people and the weekly amount of free time.

The data on the amount of leisure time per week according to financial situation show that people who indicated 5 or more hours of free time a week were characterized by both very good and good (58.5%) and average (56.7%) financial situation. In turn, respondents with 1-2 hours of free time a week had (25.0%) only an average financial situation.

The research took into account the forms of recreational activity of people aged 50+ depending on their socio-demographic characteristics and economic situation (Table 4).

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<sup>14</sup> J. Sikora, J. A. Wartecka-Ważyńska, *Wycieczki turystyczno-rekreacyjne kobiet 50+ a ich sytuacja materialna*, „Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” 2017, nr 473: *Gospodarka turystyczna w regionie. Przedsiębiorstwo, Samorząd, Współpraca*, s. 537-551.

Among the preferred forms of physical activity, the surveyed women most willingly chose walking, cycling and swimming. In the 50-59 age category walking was declared by 85.3%, cycling by 44.1% and swimming by 20.6%. Respondents aged 60 and over also preferred walking (83.5%), cycling (26.6%) and swimming (12.8%).

**Table 4.** Preferred forms of recreational activity by age, residence, education, financial situation of respondents in 2019 (pre-pandemic)\*\* and during the 2021–2022 pandemic\*\*

Category		Walking		Cycling		Swimming		Exercising/ fitness classes		Dancing		Other*		None reported	
		2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21
Age (in years)	50-59	85,3	83,3	44,1	4,7	20,6	0,0	23,5	59,5	35,3	0,0	20,6	9,5	5,9	0,0
	60 and over	83,5	79,2	26,6	9,1	12,8	2,6	40,4	5,2	22,9	2,6	15,6	1,3	3,7	0,0
Residence (Population in thousands)	up to 50	66,7	94,2	51,9	6,0	25,9	0,0	33,3	13,3	14,8	5,8	14,8	2,8	3,7	0,0
	51-100	92,3	85,7	23,1	6,5	15,4	0,0	30,8	14,3	7,7	0,0	7,7	0,0	0,0	3,6
	101 and over	88,2	75,7	25,9	7,6	12,9	3,3	37,6	6,8	31,8	0,0	20	6,6	3,5	0,0
	No data	81,0	0,0	38,1	0,0	4,8	0,0	38,1	0,0	28,6	0,0	9,5	0,0	9,5	0,0
Education	Primary/vocational	76,5	80,0	41,2	10,0	11,8	0,0	23,5	3,5	23,5	5,5	17,6	5,0	0,0	0,0
	High school	79,7	82,0	29,7	6,2	10,8	4,2	44,6	4,6	27,0	2,0	16,2	6,4	6,8	3,4
	College/university	91,8	77,5	30,6	10,2	20,4	4,4	28,6	4,8	24,5	4,5	16,4	2,1	0,0	0,0
Financial situation	Very good or good	80,3	76,7	31,8	9,3	19,7	4,65	48,5	7,0	39,4	2,4	18,2	9,1	3,0	0,0
	Average	85,5	82,3	32,9	8,1	10,5	1,9	25,0	4,1	15,8	1,8	15,8	8,7	5,3	0,0

\* including fishing, roller skating, horse riding, mountain climbing, nordic walking

\*\* values do not add up to 100 as respondents could choose multiple answers

Source: own study.

The research shows that residents of large towns with a population of 50,000 to 100,000 residents preferred forms of physical activity, such as: walking (92.3%), cycling (23.1%) and swimming (69.2%), though female respondents who live in towns with a population of over 101,000 of residents also chose walking (88.2%), cycling (92.5%) and swimming (12.9%).

Taking into account education (Table 4), it can be concluded that women with primary and basic vocational education preferred walking (76.5%) and cycling (41.2%), women with secondary education – walking (79.7%) and gymnastics (37.8%), and women with university education – walking (91.8%) and cycling (30.6%).

The analysis of the data presented in Table 4 indicates that the surveyed people characterized by a very good and good financial situation preferred active forms of recreational activity to a greater extent than people in an average financial situation. These were financially more expensive forms, which meant more money was spent.

It means that among these preferences the dominant ones (apart from walking) were: gymnastics (42.4%), dancing (39.4%), swimming (19.7%). The same forms of physical activity of women with an average financial situation were much less frequent, e.g. gymnastics (21.1%), dancing (15.8%), swimming (10.5%).

The analysis of the data listed in Table 4 shows that during the pandemic, forms of active recreational activity were most often preferred, such as: walking (83.3% – up to 59 years old; 79.2% – over 60 years old), gymnastics and fitness classes (59.5% – up to 59 years of age; 5.2% – over 60 years of age) and bicycle (4.7% – up to 59 years of age; 9.1% – over 60 years of age). Activities such as swimming and Nordic walking were mentioned by very few respondents.

The greatest diversity of forms of active recreational activity was found (6 forms out of 7) among respondents with a place of residence of over 101,000 inhabitants. It should be pointed out that the place of residence did not significantly determine the answers given by the remaining respondents. The situation is similar if the education of the respondents is taken into account. Walking was chosen by 80.0% of primary/vocational educated people; 82.0% by those who completed secondary level; 77.5% of university educated ones. Gymnastics and fitness classes were of interest to 3.5% of respondents with primary and basic vocational education, 4.6% to secondary and 4.8% to university education.

The surveyed people of a very good and good financial situation preferred active forms of recreational activity to a greater extent (swimming – 4.65%, gymnastics and fitness classes – 7.0%, walking with poles – 2.4%) than people in an average material status (swimming – 1.9%, gymnastics and fitness classes – 4.1%, walking with sticks – 0.0%). The indicated forms of activity required the respondents to spend more money on their realization.

The results regarding institutional organizers of recreational activity declared by the surveyed women, depending on demographic, social and economic characteristics, are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Organizers of recreational activities by age, residence, education, financial situation of respondents in 2019 (pre-pandemic) \*\* and during the pandemic (2021-2022)

Category		Senior centers		University of the Third Age		On one's own		Friends		Other*		None reported	
		2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21
Age (years)	50-59	19,9	2,4	22,6	11,9	67,1	59,5	24,7	2,4	8,2	24,8	4,8	0,0
	60 and over	26,5	6,5	11,8	19,5	79,4	54,5	23,5	6,5	2,9	9,1	0,0	0,0
Residence (Population in thousands)	up to 50	18,5	5,9	7,4	5,9	70,4	70,6	11,1	5,9	7,4	13,7	11,1	0,0
	51-100	15,4	7,1	30,8	21,4	69,2	71,4	15,4	2,4	15,4	7,4	0,0	0,0
	101 and over	20,0	4,55	23,5	16,7	71,8	51,5	29,4	3,0	8,2	24,8	2,4	0,0
	No data	23,8	0,0	33,3	0,0	42,9	0,0	28,6	0,0	4,8	0,0	9,5	0,0
Education	Primary Vocational	41,2	0,0	11,8	10,0	64,7	90,0	35,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	11,8	0,0
	High school	20,3	6,0	25,7	22,0	62,2	50,0	17,6	10,0	9,5	14,0	5,4	0,0
	College/university	12,2	6,2	22,4	18,4	75,5	55,1	28,6	0,0	8,2	25,7	2,0	0,0
Financial situation	Very good or good	31,8	9,3	16,7	20,1	68,2	41,9	31,8	0,0	7,6	28,9	3,0	0,0
	Average	10,5	3,2	27,6	14,5	68,4	62,7	19,7	9,7	7,9	13,9	5,3	0,0

\* including fitness centers and community centers

\*\* values do not add up to 100 as respondents could choose multiple answers

Source: own study.

Before the pandemic, the surveyed women most often chose an independent organization, reference groups (friends), a senior club and the University of the Third Age as the most common organizers of their recreational activity. In the 50-59 age category, independent organization of activities was declared by (67.1%), reference groups (24.7%), the University of the Third Age (22.6.1%, and the senior club (19.9%). Those aged 60 and over also preferred self-organization (79.4%), the reference group (23.5%), the senior club (26.5%) and the University of the Third Age (11.8%).

The research shows that residents of large towns with a population of 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants as organizers of recreational activities preferred: independent organization (69.2%), University of the Third Age (30.8%) and a reference group (friends and colleagues) (15.4%).

While analyzing the data of the recreational activity organizers in connection with the financial situation of the respondents (Table 5), it can be seen that over one third of women (31.8%) with a very good and good financial situation were associated with the activities of a senior club. Respondents in an average financial situation were mostly interested in activities organized by the Universities of the Third Age (27.6%).

The institutions indicated by the respondents that organized recreational activities did not enjoy much interest during the pandemic. The University of the Third Age (UTW) was chosen by 11.9% – under 59-year-olds; by 19.5% of the over 60-year-old citizens.

Taking into account the education of respondents, The University of the Third Age was chosen by 22% of secondary and 18.4% university educated people who live mostly in towns with 51,000 – 100,000 inhabitants (21.4%), UTW was mentioned only by 5.9% inhabitants who live in towns up to 50,000 inhabitants. The senior club was indicated by 2.4% of surveyed people at age of 59 years or less old and 6.5% in case of the over 60- year-olds. The seniors' club as an organizer of recreational activity was chosen by 5.9% of inhabitants of towns with 50,000 population.

It is worth emphasizing that more than half of the respondents organize recreational activities independently, regardless of the size of the place of residence. Taking into account education, recreational activities were independently organized by people with a predominance of primary and basic vocational education (90.0%). Other organizational institutions, such as a fitness center, were mostly mentioned by people with academic education (25.7%) and having a very good or good financial situation (28.9%). In contrary, respondents with an average financial status used activities organized by the Senior Club (3.2%), the University of the Third Age (14.5%) to a small extent and decided mostly on independent organization (62.7%) of such activity.

An essential aspect of the research was to determine whether the preferred forms of physical activity the respondents would rather realize individually or in the company of others (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Ways of engaging in recreational activities (with whom) by age, residence, education, financial situation of respondents (pre-pandemic) \*\* and during the pandemic (2021-2022)

Category		Alone		With friends		With family		Other		None reported	
		2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21	2019	20/21
Age (years)	50–59	67,6	52,5	47,1	12,5	55,9	32,5	0,0	2,5	2,9	0,0
	60 and over	67,0	57,7	42,2	15,4	25,7	24,3	5,5	2,6	3,7	0,0
Residence (Population in thousands)	up to 50	51,9	41,2	40,7	17,6	48,1	41,2	3,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
	51–100	69,2	57,1	23,1	7,2	30,8	21,4	0,0	14,3	7,7	0,0
	101 and over	77,6	49,0	48,2	16,3	31,8	32,6	4,7	2,1	1,2	0,0
	No data	42,9	0,0	47,6	0,0	14,3	0,0	4,8	0,0	4,3	100,0
Education	Primary/vocational	47,1	57,9	41,2	10,5	35,3	26,3	0,0	5,3	5,9	0,0
	High school	73,0	62,0	39,2	12,0	28,4	22,0	6,8	4,0	4,1	0,0
	College/university	67,3	3,9	49,0	31,4	40,8	64,7	2,0	0,0	2,0	0,0
Financial situation	Very good or good	65,2	44,2	51,5	16,3	34,8	37,2	1,5	2,3	4,5	0,0
	Average	67,1	60,3	40,8	13,2	30,3	21,5	6,6	5,0	2,6	0,0

\*\* values do not add up to 100 as respondents could choose multiple answers

Source: own study.

The results of the research presented in Table 6 indicate that the largest percentage of respondents (67.6%) valued individual methods of physical activity. They were both people from the first age group (50-59 years old) and the second age group (60 and more years old). It is certainly related to the need to be active on the so-called “own terms”, i.e. in an unobtrusive place, at your own pace, etc. Nearly 50% of fifty-year-olds liked physical activity in the company of friends (47.1%) or family (55, 9%). People over 60 valued the presence of family members during physical activity to a lesser extent (25.7%).

Respondents from cities (101,000 and more inhabitants) were mostly focused on physical activity alone (77.6%) whilst for their peers from towns (up to 50,000) the number was slightly over half (51.9%); and for the inhabitants of big towns 51-100,000 it rose to 69.2%.

More than 40% of residents of towns with a population of up to 50,000 and cities over 101,000 would spend their free time actively with friends and family. 73.0% people with secondary and academic education were most likely to spend their free time actively. More than 40% of people with university education also declared the company of friends (49.0%) and family (40.8%) in recreational activities.

The financial situation of respondents in total: very good or good and the average in a similar percentage (accordingly 65.2% and 67.1%) determined spending leisure time individually during physical activity.

However, the data presented in Table 6 show that during the pandemic more than half of the surveyed people undertook various forms of recreational activity on their own. Activity with family members was listed by 32.5% of respondents of the age up to 50 years old and 24.3% by over 60-year-olds, living mostly in towns with up to 50,000 inhabitants (41.2%), while the next results were obtained in cities with more than 101,000 inhabitants.

Respondents with academic education definitely dominated in the answers, but in terms of the way of performing recreational activities with friends (31.4%) and with family (64.7%). Respondents with primary and basic vocational (57.9%) and secondary (62.0%) education mostly practiced recreational activities individually.

People in a very good and good financial situation undertook recreational activity alone (44.2%) or with family (37.2%), whereas among people describing their financial situation as average, as many as 60.3% carried out activities on their own, and only 21.5% with their family.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the material situation, both very good, good and average, had the same impact on the respondents' preference for an individual way of spending free time in the selected physical activity.

## **Conclusions**

In terms of recreational activities, senior citizens represent a very distinctive market segment. Factors such as age, place of residence, education (socio-demographic) and material (economic) situation to a large extent determined the participation of older people in recreational activities in the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, and even more clearly during the pandemic. On the basis of the research conducted before and during the pandemic crisis among seniors on their recreational activity, appropriate generalizations and conclusions can be formulated.

The weekly amount of free time of the surveyed seniors aged 50+ had no statistically significant association with their age, place of residence, education or financial situation.

Both before the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout its duration in 2021-2022, the longer leisure time was declared by people living in the cities of 101,000 inhabitants or more.

Before the pandemic and during the pandemic, a large percentage of respondents (over 50%), regardless of the socio-demographic characteristics and financial situation analyzed in the research, indicated more than 5 hours of leisure time a week, which may stimulate decision-making in the field of recreational activity. People over 60 had more leisure time which during the pandemic did not have to be determined only by professional activity.

It should be emphasized that before and during the pandemic, seniors with 5 or more hours of leisure time per week had a very good, good (58.6%) and average (56.7%) financial situation.

The results of the study showed that walking was the dominant form of recreational activity. Both before and during the pandemic, regardless of age, place of residence, education, financial situation, walking was the predominant form of physical activity.

Before the pandemic, cycling, gymnastics and fitness classes as well as swimming were preferred. During the pandemic, seniors indicated gymnastics, cycling and swimming.

It should also be emphasized that before the pandemic, Nordic walking was indicated as a form of physical activity. At the same time, this form of activity during the pandemic was almost completely marginalized.

Before the pandemic, various organizers of recreational activities for the elderly could be distinguished. Independent organization of this activity prevailed. It was also quite widely supported by informal peer groups, Universities of the Third Age and senior clubs.

During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, an independent form of organization of recreational activity by the elderly also prevailed. However, other organizers of such activity, especially senior clubs, have almost disappeared. Co-organization of physical activity by seniors together with acquaintances and friends was also



reduced. Thus, resulted with social isolation of the senior citizens which led to recreational passivity and obviously resulted in bad influence on their health.

Taking into account the ways of implementing recreational activities before the pandemic, seniors pointed to various possibilities. They performed their activities alone, as well as with family or friends. Whereas, during the pandemic, recreational activities were organized and conducted alone or with the closest family members prevailed, rather than with friends. In both cases, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents did not play a significant role.

The material situation, both very good or good and average before the pandemic, was more often indicated by the respondents as a factor conducive to individual preference and, together with friends, the way of recreational activity. Similarly, during the pandemic, this economic factor also significantly determined the individual way of recreational activity although not with friends but with the closest family members.

The issues of the elderly, including the need and motivation for physical activity, should be widely taken into account in the creation and implementation of seniors' recreational activity programs by all state and local government administration institutions and non-profit organizations, especially after the pandemic period.

These phenomena will be accompanied by the need to develop medical, social, care, leisure and recreation services. Therefore, it is and will be important to create a successful aging strategy that takes into account the preservation of physical, mental and social health, which will encourage seniors to be active in social life without discrimination on the grounds of age<sup>15</sup>.

Contemporary seniors are healthier, better educated, aware of their abilities and potential. They also have greater opportunities in the implementation of various forms of activity, through the creation of new institutions and facilities working for active aging, which is conducive to overcoming crises of senior age<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> H. Worach-Kardas *Starość w cyklu życia, Społeczne i zdrowotne oblicza późnej dorosłości*, Katowice, „Śląsk”, Wydawnictwo Naukowe 2015, s. 56.

<sup>16</sup> T. Stabiak, *Rola aktywności osób starszych w przezwyciężaniu kryzysów starości – wybrane aspekty*, „Home et Societas. Wokół Pracy Socjalnej” 2021, nr 6, s. 96-108.

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### **Kryzysy starości a aktywność rekreacyjna seniorów przed i w czasie kryzysu pandemii Covid-19 w Polsce**

#### **Streszczenie**

Obecne starzenie się społeczeństw stanowi istotną kwestię, która bezpośrednio wpływa na funkcjonowanie rodzin, grup oraz całych społeczeństw. Kwestia zdrowotności starzejącego się społeczeństwa stała się szczególnie istotna podczas kryzysu pandemii. Duże znaczenie odgrywa więc aktywność fizyczna wpływająca na stan zdrowia i dobre samopoczucie. Pojawiają się różnorodne formy aktywności adresowane dla seniorów.

Celem prezentowanego artykułu jest ukazanie roli różnych form i rodzajów aktywności rekreacyjnej osób starszych w aspekcie pojawiających się kryzysów starości przed i w trakcie pandemii (COVID-19) na podstawie badań własnych. Wyniki przeprowadzonych badań empirycznych wskazały, że na formy aktywności rekreacyjnej seniorów przed pandemią i podczas pandemii miały wpływ takie czynniki, jak wiek, miejsce zamieszkania, wykształcenie i sytuacja materialna. Oczekuje się, że wyniki tych badań przyczynią się zarówno pod względem teoretycznym i praktycznym do oceny decyzyjności osób starszych w zakresie aktywności rekreacyjnej, przeciwdziałając tym samym kryzysowi starości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys starości, aktywność rekreacyjna, kryzys pandemii