

LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OLD PEOPLE IN THE REGION OF MADRID

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In recent decades, the Quality of Life (QoL) has become a relevant topic for researchers and social policy makers, in order to find and maintaining the satisfaction and happiness of the people; in a parallel way, the analysis of the activities performed by the population in the final years of life is a matter of concern, since it is over retirement when adults have more time to develop other activities apart from work; these activities give them satisfaction and wellness in this moment of adaptation to old age.

The relationship between QoL and leisure has been highlighted in several empirical studies and has shown the enormous benefits of the practice of leisure activities in old age; those

benefits are especially important to improve physical and mental conditions of the elderly as well as to improve their living conditions and increasing their overall satisfaction with life.

This article focuses on the analysis of the practice of leisure among the elderly population living in the Community of Madrid, in order to identify how personal and living conditions are related to the participation in leisure activities as an important dimension of QoL. It is considered that there are differences in the practice of leisure activities and their contribution to satisfaction with this dimension of QoL of the elderly according to their sociodemographic characteristics, but also to other factors. Because of this, firstly, we study the activities performed by this population group, by type, determining the level of satisfaction resulting from this practice. Sociodemographic characteristics of this population and other personal conditions related to QoL are also taken into account for explaining leisure activities; in addition, emotional well-being and coping with life, financial resources and other factors related to social conditions, as well as health and functioning, the way of living and social and family networks, are also considered.

A QoL survey completed by 499 elders on a representative sample with population aged 65 and over who live in dwellings in the Madrid region (CadeViMa-2005) was used to achieve the research objectives. Considering a universe of 959,993 old people, a stratified random sampling proportional to the size of each stratum was conducted; the strata were established by gender (male, female), age (65-74, 75-84, and 85 and over) and size of area of residence according to the seven areas considered by the Institute of Statistics of the Community of Madrid (Central area, North and South of the municipality of Madrid, NW metropolitan area, E and S, other non-metropolitan areas). The survey was designed as a semi-structured questionnaire including objective and subjective questions on several dimensions of QoL.

Regarding the dimension of leisure in the QoL of the elderly, the questionnaire collects information on the frequency of performance (usually, sometimes, never) of fourteen leisure activities according to the following five types of leisure considered from the literature: 1) physical leisure; 2) cultural leisure; 3) social and participative leisure; 4) passive leisure; 5) travel and tourism. In addition, the questionnaire asked about activities started in recent years, the most interesting activities performed by this people, and the reasons why the elderly practice more or less activities that they would like to. About the subjective perspective, other questions investigate the level of satisfaction with the activities. Regarding the statistical techniques applied, it is firstly showed a descriptive statistical analysis of the frequency of leisure activities, followed by the use of cluster analysis to obtain a classification of people into homogeneous groups according to the type and intensity of their leisure practice.

Considering the four resulting homogeneous groups, the first (with 17.6% of cases) is characterized by a low level of participation in leisure activities of any type; the second group (27.4%) practices a fundamentally passive recreation; the third (25.6% of cases) is especially characterized by developing passive combined with cultural leisure; finally, the largest group (29.3%) practices indiscriminately and intensely any leisure except physical activities, travel and tourism, but with special relevance passive, cultural, social and participative leisure. Also passive activities play a noteworthy role in groups 3 and 4. These four typologies of leisure have been used later to analyze the association of individuals with personal and contextual variables in order to understand the factors explaining the practice of leisure as a dimension of QoL in old age.

Among the leisure activities, the most commonly performed by adults is watch TV and listen to the radio (95.2% of the population practice 'usually' or 'sometimes' these activities), followed by reading (newspapers, books, ...), go out with friends for a walk, listen to music and watch videos / DVDs. A high percentage also said to practice travel and tourism (64.6%), but less than half declared to go to the cinema or to the theater, and even less than half reported to do something active.

The participation in intellectual activities is still low, and only 1 in 10 people made ('usually' or 'sometimes') some type of course (even craft and practical work), 7.6% used new technologies (Internet), and only 5.5% reported to be involved with any association or NGO.

Taking into account all the leisure activities considered in this study, nearly 6 in 10 people states a common practice between 1 and 6 activities (mean: 5.8); it is shown a statistically significant association between the number of activities performed and age, marital status and social class, so a greater intensity in leisure practice is between the old-young, married and separated / divorced, those who have reached a higher level of education and those are grouped in segments of higher social status. Regarding the evaluation of satisfaction with leisure activities such as a subjective indicator, more than 8 in 10 olders states they were fairly or very satisfied, showing a direct relationship between the number of activities performed and the satisfaction.

With regard to participation in leisure activities according to sociodemographic factors, the influence of age on the practice and type of entertainment is clear, because as elderly get older they decrease the number of activities performed and the type of leisure becomes more passive.

The marital status of the respondents revealed among married and separated / divorced a tendency to a higher practice of any activity or leisure, but also a tendency among singles to be involved in cultural activities; on the other hand, widowers develop a more passive leisure, what can be explained by other possible influences on the level of competition related to health and functioning as they get age.

Regarding educational level, there is statistically significant association between the practice of leisure different to passive and educational level. Thus, the largest group of those who have no education, or having less than primary or only primary education, are included in cluster 2 (passive leisure), but differently, those who have more education tend to be more involved in cultural entertainment.

The study of the social class is understood as a derived variable of educational level and socioeconomic status; most of the elderly members included in cluster 4 (high participation in any type of leisure) and in cluster 3 (passive leisure and cultural) belongs to middle and upper classes, while lower activity levels (cluster 1) and even passive leisure (cluster 2) are developed among the elderly lower social class. Taking into account that 75% of respondents are included in the category of low social status and low-medium, the differences are minimized, but those performing little leisure or passive are dominant. The low educational level of the elderly and their generalized low or medium-low social status help to understand the low demand for training and also the insufficient interest of this population for other educational activities (languages, computing, artistic education, etc.); the evidence is that more than 8 out of 10 people declare no interest, or little, for the completion of any courses.

While it is quite clear the influence of educational level and social class of the elderly on the practice of leisure, no relation is showed with the income level, at least measured

in a objective way (total monthly income). However, satisfaction with leisure activities is more important (*p-values* 0.000) than related to the overall economic situation of the elderly. On the one hand, seniors who are the most satisfied with their economic situation are not necessarily those who declare higher monthly incomes; also, those who are fairly or very satisfied have more active participation in all types of leisure (cluster 4) or in passive activities and cultural leisure (cluster 3) than those who are less satisfied. On the other hand, the less satisfied with their economic status tend to develop more passive leisure (cluster 2) or not to participate in leisure activities.

The health is considered by the old people the most important variable of their QoL; there is significant relationship between the intensity in the practice of leisure activities and the Quality of Life related to health (QoLRH), the functional status of the person, and the perception of health status. Thus, those who claim to do more leisure activities also have a better QoLRH and better perception of their health, better functional capacity and lower levels of depression; also, people who say to have difficulty for walking, for personal care and for performing daily activities, or being anxious, are constrained in their leisure practice and are mainly classified in the group defined by the development of more passive leisure.

Positive emotions and satisfaction with personal skills are also related to leisure, but this relation is reverse when seniors feel loneliness; on the contrary, when people often feel happy, excited, wanting to do things, or they do not often feel alone, they receive a good image of themselves and are well treated and respected by society, they use to practice more leisure.

Family is another dimension that has emerged as important in the QoL of the elderly, and within this dimension, it is considered the way of living and the household structure. The main feature in the tested population is that those living alone or live with a partner are more involved in leisure activities of any type; nevertheless, those who live under other family structure (live with friends and others, or without a partner but live with other people) are associated with low participation in leisure activities or passive and cultural leisure; however, living with no first-degree relatives is the most common feature for those who practice passive leisure or passive mixed with cultural leisure. Friendships and social relationships are also important for the QoL: most old people interviewed in the Community of Madrid claim to have more friends than just only known people, and they have high contact with them; this refuse the conventional idea that seniors live their lives isolated.

To conclude, this paper highlights that leisure developed in free time is the fifth dimension of QoL point out by the elderly, and also is the fifth dimension (with a value of 60 out of 100) considering the level of satisfaction; this study has also shown the importance that leisure activities have on the quality and life conditions of seniors, and the importance of the satisfaction of leisure activities.

One conclusion of the study is that the practice of leisure by the elderly who live in the Community of Madrid is fundamentally passive and does not require great physical or intellectual effort. Most of seniors are not actively using their old age, but this can be explained in the context of a generation of Spanish whose working and life conditions were very different in the past to the current ones; also, they had a low educational level and few cultural and intellectual hobbies.

Another conclusion is that the type and frequency of leisure activities are very related to individual, family and social factors. Variables such as being older, female, less educated or

having poor social relationships, mental suffering and physical limitations, show correlation with developing less leisure activities. These differences could be explained by the fact that women of those generations are more engaged in housework and personal care activities as they get older; by contrast, it is more common for men to practice different activities such as walking or cycling, including moderate sports, gardening and various activities related to home repair.

Education, social class, and physical and mental health are also closely related to the amount and type of leisure performed; nevertheless, leisure is also explained by the cultural environment, although more research is needed to determine the influence of these factors, for example to explain the demand of specific intellectual activities and related to the use of new technologies.

Aging must not only be associated with a resting stage typical of industrial societies, but it is expanding the paradigm supported in sport and activity for healthier aging, in association with the idea of old age as a more and more positive period in life. Therefore, it is expected that activities developed by the elderly during the retirement will vary as new and more educated cohorts of workers begin to incorporate, with more economic availability and with the desire to live actively this stage of the life; then, retirement will not only be seen as a rest after work.

