

PIOTR KSIAŻEK, JUSTYNA STANIAK, NATALIA SZCZEPANIK,  
MACIEJ KAMIŃSKI, PIOTR OKOŃSKI

## Samoocena aktywności i kondycji fizycznej słuchaczy Lubelskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku w Lublinie

### Streszczenie

**Wstęp.** Wzrastająca liczba osób starszych determinuje konieczność aktywizowania ich społecznie i ruchowo, aby jak najdłużej mogli być sprawni. Należy zbadać czy ta grupa społeczna prowadzi zdrowy styl życia. Jednym z jego determinantów będzie aktywność fizyczna, która wpływa na utrzymanie dobrej kondycji fizycznej i psychicznej.

**Cel.** Celem pracy było przedstawienie poziomu aktywności fizycznej słuchaczy Lubelskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku w ich samoocenie.

**Materiał i metody.** Badanie przeprowadzono w Lubelskim Uniwersytecie Trzeciego Wieku na grupie 85 osób powyżej 55 roku życia. Słuchaczy uniwersytetu badano przy pomocy kwestionariusza ankiety.

**Wyniki.** Większość słuchaczy Lubelskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku jest aktywna fizycznie. Około 50% badanych ćwiczy na zajęciach oferowanych przez uniwersytet, wśród osób aktywnych 80% ćwiczy także w domu. Najczęściej podejmowaną formą aktywności fizycznej są zespoły gimnastyczne (31%). Wykazano również, że wiek może mieć wpływ na ocenę własnego zdrowia. Najliczniejszą grupę (40%) oceniającą je jako dobre stanowili słuchacze w wieku 55-64 lat. Pomimo tego, to najstarsza grupa wiekowa (75-84 lata) jest najbardziej zadowolona ze swojej kondycji fizycznej.

**Wnioski.** Słuchacze Lubelskiego Uniwersytetu Medycznego są aktywni fizycznie. Swoją kondycję mogą usprawniać dzięki bogatej ofercie uniwersytetu, który stanowi środowisko wspierające zdrowie, pomocne w kształtowaniu postaw prozdrowotnych

## Physical activity and physical fitness of the Lubelski Third Age University students in their opinion

### Abstract

**Introduction.** The increasing number of older people determines the necessity to activate them socially and physically. Research should be carried out to find if this particular social group leads a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity is one of its determinants and it influences maintaining good physical and psychical form.

**Aim.** The aim of this survey was to present subjective physical activity level of the students of the Third Age University in Lublin.

**Material and methods.** The study was conducted at the Third Age University in Lublin among 85 students aged above 55 years. The students were examined with a questionnaire.

**Results.** Most of the students of the Lubelski Third Age University are active people. Fifty per cent of respondents exercise at university classes. Among active people, 80% exercise also at home. Mostly preferred form of activity is gymnastics (31%). It was also indicated that age can influence the opinion about personal health state. The biggest group of respondent (40%) evaluating it as good were 55-64 year-old students. However, the oldest age group (75-84 years old) is most satisfied of their physical form.

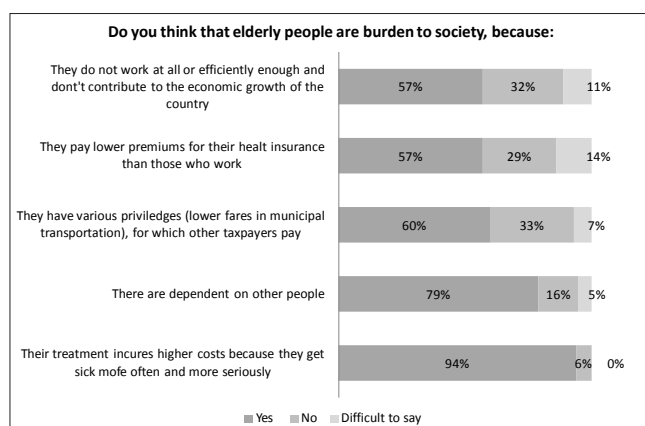
**Conclusions.** The students of the Lubelski Third Age University are physically active. The students can maintain their fitness thanks to a wide offer of the university, which is the health-favoring environment and which can help with learning pro-health habits.

**Słowa kluczowe:** osoby starsze, słuchacze, Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wieku, aktywność fizyczna.

**Keywords:** older people, students, Third Age University, physical activity.

## INTRODUCTION

Due to the progress of civilization, there has been a mushroom growth of medicine along with new technologies, diagnostics, rehabilitation as well as medical equipment and medicines. Prevention, hitherto treated by healthcare marginally, has also grown in importance. Emphasis on taking up preventive measures is in large measure determined by changes in demographic structure of population. Scientific development entails numerous benefits, including the increase of life expectancy. Although this process seems to be positive from the point of view of an individual, the ongoing ageing of society is an unsettling phenomenon, taking into consideration a dearth of specialists (that is gerontologists and geriatricians). According to that, social stimulation of the elders (as well as those who have not yet reached retirement age) has become an important issue. Prolongation of human life expectancy renders the process of ageing dynamic and progressive. Specialists' predictions indicate that the number of people over sixty-year-old has increased by 70 million during 1995-2050. It gives nearly 100% more seniors (from 186 to 326 in 1000 persons) [1]. The pace of transformations is quick – human lifespan has risen by 15 years for men and 18 years for women in comparison to the fifties of the 20th century. According to GUS<sup>1</sup>, the average men's longevity in 2008 came to 71.3 and women's to 80. It is the highest life expectancy discrepancy in Europe [2]. The progressing ageing of population has a substantial impact on the way socio-economic reality functions in a given society. For instance, it creates necessity for the government to maintain increasingly higher number of citizens, who, because of being beyond retirement age, are not able to generate notable economic benefits. Healthcare, also encumbered with costs, becomes unwieldy when faced with the raising number of elderly people. Because of the dominance of costly defensive medicine in Polish healthcare, improvement of the quality of seniors' life is necessary for them to easily and independently function in society. According to CBOS<sup>2</sup>, majority of taxpayers notices the problem of generating high costs connected with healthcare by senior citizens (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1. Respondents' opinion on seniors being a burden for society.**

[source: CBOS, 2009]

As reported by respondents, it is expenditure on medical treatment of seniors that is the main cause for them being perceived as a burden for society. A substantial proportion (79%) of respondents also indicates lack of self-reliance (mentioned above) of this social group. This fact emphasizes the salience of early prophylaxis as well as health education, thus avoiding suppression of social, physical and mental development. At this point, it should be stressed that merely 9% of the polled regards the elderly as a burden [3]. In the last years, the image of a Polish senior has undergone a transformation. Society begins to realize that achieving so-called "third age" may be connected with many benefits. First and foremost, elderly people have more free time that they can devote to their families (e.g. taking care of grandchildren) or local community (social activity) and they have wide knowledge and life experience that they can share with others. One of the priorities of The International Plan of Action on Ageing is to perceive seniors as a genuine national treasure. Others discuss the need to provide enhancement in the standard of living to everyone and the necessity for elderly people to take an active part in social life [4]. A modern senior should not be rejected or shunt on to the sidelines but be thoroughly active. This is why high quality of seniors' life should be taken care of with particular attention as one of the main course of action of healthcare.

Quality of life is a complex issue since it is determined by many diverse factors and, what is more, is often perceived from a subjective viewpoint. As far as the elderly are concerned, the quality of life consists of good health, independence, financial security and relationships. It all can be provided by broadly defined personal development guaranteed by the University of the Third Age throughout the world.

The first University of the Third Age was founded on the initiative of a French professor of international law – PierreVellas. His work, originally oriented at local community co-operation, was strictly connected with the functioning of the University of the Third Age in Toulouse. For some time it was called International Association of Universities of the Third Age (l'AssociationInternationale des Universiti  du Troisi me ge – AIUTA) [5]. The central idea of Universities of the Third Age (hereafter referred to as U3A or the universities) is a broadly defined adaptation of elderly people to living in society. The founder of the initiative assumed that the primary task of his activity would be comprehensive education of seniors, the intention of which is to boost psycho-physical condition with the emphasis on intellectual development. It is to be reflected in daily life by alternation in the way seniors are perceived, i.e., a transition from a stereotypical (feeble, useless) image of an old person to a person fully aware of his/her capabilities, who cannot be excluded from active participation in the life of a community because of his/her age. Consequently, "an old person" is no longer a synonym for "socially inactive"; it is quite the opposite – such a person becomes healthier, mobile and better educated. U3A's work is now widely spread. In France alone, there are many organizations of similar profile, inter alia

<sup>1</sup> GUS – stands for G wny Urz d Statystyczny – Polish equivalent to Central Statistical Office

<sup>2</sup> CBOS – stands for Centrum Badania Opinii Spo ecznej – Polish equivalent to Public Opinion Research Centre

the French Association of Universities of All Ages, founded in 1980. These institutions were called universities of free time or universities of all ages, which, just like U3A, act in the area of the universities [6]. Presently in Poland, there are 110 such universities. The organs that U3A consists of may be universities, local authorities, associations and community centers; institutions are financed by membership fees, local government and cultural institutions grant. Responsibilities of a given university towards its listeners are stipulated in its statute. The scope of activity is extremely wide – not only does it involve mental development (lectures, foreign languages learning, computer workshops, reading, debating and literary clubs) but also puts emphasis on promoting and living healthy lifestyle (hiking and gym sections, rehabilitation, art therapy, music therapy) [7]. Participation in classes conducted by the universities is voluntary and the members are called auditors rather than students (they do not have student record books and do not take exams). There is also no existing criteria specifying the exact age of a person willing to attend U3A. It can be a person in pre-retirement age as well as a pensioner. U3A enables self-realization on many different levels. It is possible due to a wide profile of the actions taken. As it was mentioned before, the goal of U3A of overriding importance is strengthening of seniors' intellectual potential. This initiative is realized through so called education on ageing, which main assumption is considering the last phase of life as convenient for further development. One may say that old persons can get the most out of their remaining years. The means of education at the universities is touching upon different subject matters presented in a form of lectures (therein medicine). Apart from lectures, U3A provide all kinds of courses and workshops. Some of them enable acquisition of new skills like computer literacy or foreign languages. The initiative in creating a society integrated on the basis of possibilities that the apt usage of the Internet brings has been taken already in 2005. The elderly, not able to keep up with the pace of the progress of science and technology, became one of the target groups [8]. Computer literacy and, what follows from that, the ability to use the Internet, facilitates looking for information on various subjects, inter alia health matters, which promotes maintaining health habits.

## AIM

The aim of this study was to present the activity of the Third Age Universities and to examine an academia of students in Lubelski Third Age University in respect of their physical activity in and outside the university. Examination of the physical activity level was based on the subjective opinion of the responders.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study involved 90 older people who were participating in Lubelski Third University lectures. Restoration was at about 94% (85 questionnaires). The respondents were divided on three age groups: 55-64, 65-74 and 75-84 year old; whereof the biggest was the middle one (44% of examined). There was nobody with basic and secondary education in the

research group. Most students (65%) had higher education. The survey involved 75 retirees (88%).

The examination method used in this study was a diagnostic poll, which can show the subjective opinions of the chosen population. To analyze those there was used a questionnaire made with basic rules of construction. The questionnaire contained 31 questions, therein seven in the demographic part (questions about age, sex, material status, living place, education, place of employment and profession) and 24 questions in the subject of survey part, which especially concerned: participation of the Lubelski Third Age University students in activity classes offered by this institution, own initiatives for physical activity and personal opinion about their health. The questionnaire contained five open, six half-closed and 20 closed questions (therein two with multiple choice). There were seven more questions from standardized questionnaire (International Questionnaire of Physical Activity) attached to major survey. It specified how many days weekly the students of Lubelski Third Age University (also those who work) commit their time to exercise.

## RESULTS

In this study there was examined the level of physical activity presented by students of University of the Third Age in Lublin (hereinafter called U3AL), which has a wide educational and motivational offer. The university was established on the initiative of professor Halina Szwarc on the grounds of the official resolution that U3AL is to function as the Council of Free Polish University in Lublin's agenda. A board meeting of the Council of Free Polish University in Lublin (FPU) took place on 18th of September 1985. By the end of the month (30th of September 1985) the President of Marie Curie-Skłodowska University inaugurated academic year for the first time [9]. U3AL, as well as other regional branches, favor broadly defined activation of seniors. Educational activities are realized in co-operation with local universities, i.e. Medical University of Lublin (MU), Maria Skłodowska-Curie University (MCSU) and Catholic University of Lublin (CUL). Theoretical lectures on health, including anatomy, physiology, the latest medical achievements and geriatric prophylaxis, are given by MU staff (various consultants). Subjects of arts, law and economy are brought up as a part of the lectures. Lectures on nature, on the other hand, touch upon geo-biological aspects. Foreign languages classes offered by U3AL (English, French, Italian and German) help overcome cultural barriers. Members' mental potential is augmented by participation in varied interest classes like art, history of art, history, radio and literature, psychology or gardening. Apart from this, seniors can develop their abilities in the chorus and art club as well as three-grade computer courses. From the point of view of public health, U3AL plays an important role in shaping behavior patterns related to healthy lifestyle and creates opportunity to influence one's own health. It happens not only by means of theoretical knowledge but also thanks to sport clubs: dance club (dance lessons and parties), exercise with music club (exercises focused on improving motor skills and memory), gym classes (overall enhancement of fitness and stamina) and swimming club (swimming lessons

and aqua gymnastics) [10]. It is commonly known that exercising, in great measure, determines the quality of life. Functional performance drops by 2% among people physically active and by 10% among those who live a passive life. Research proves that U3AL members are physically active. Although not everybody attends U3A (50%), it is additional activity for most respondents. The results show that more than 80% of U3AL members go in for sports outside of the university (Figure 2).

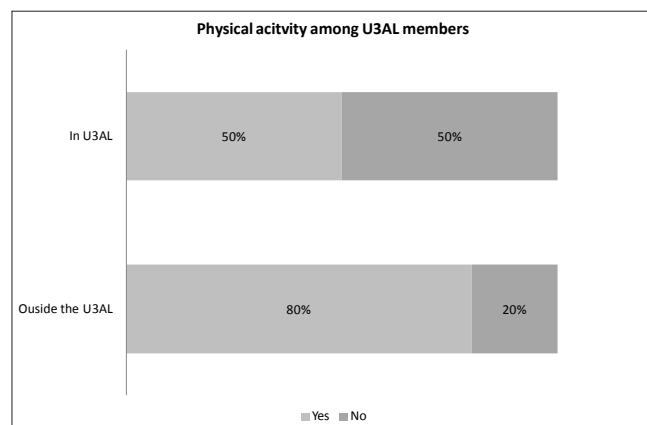


FIGURE 2. Physical activity among U3AL.

It means that socially active senior wants to take care of his own physical form. Of course, the mobility of older person is conditioned by their health state. It is commonly known that aging person is more exposed on diseases. That is why age will have influence to personal opinion about health state and physical condition. Most students (in all age groups) of Third Age University in Lublin evaluate their health state as average (Figure 3). Nevertheless, a notable part of respondents indicates that it is good. In this group the biggest population was seniors 55-64 years old (40%), the less small – 74-85 years old 31%.

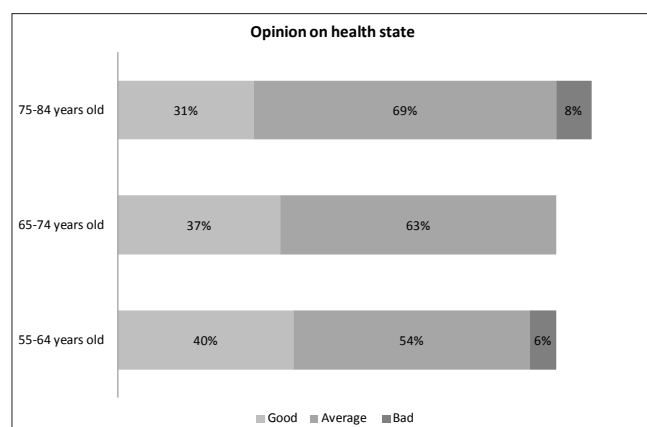


FIGURE 3. Opinion on health state.

Similar dependence was observed in survey conducted in Great Britain in 1991, which involved 626 people in age above 55 and 138 people above 75 year of life. In the first group 78% of respondents answered that their physical condition is good and very good; while 36% who represent the other group pointed on will (necessity) to improve their

health state [11]. Despite that health is often the barrier in taking physical activity (12% seniors from non-active group pointed it as a direct cause), majority is satisfied with their health form where people aged 74-85 years consist here 77% (Figure 4).

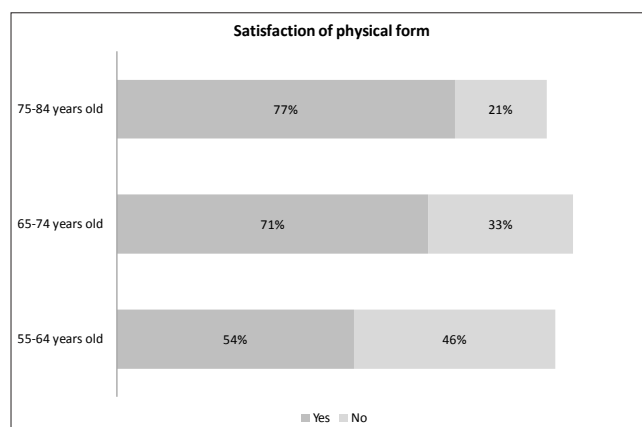


FIGURE 4. Satisfaction with health condition.

As it was mentioned, the students of Lubelski Third Age University can improve their physical form in several exercise classes (Figure 5). Most likely seniors take Tai Chi classes and tourist group (16%). Least popular were the dancing classes (12%).

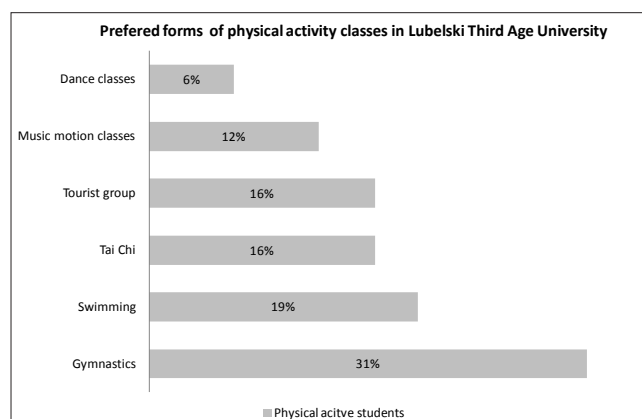


FIGURE 5. Preferred forms of physical activity classes in Lubelski Third Age University.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The activity of U3A as a social activity and health-favoring environment cooperates with changes in population life structure. It must be taken for consideration to develop the activity of universities and increase the number of willing to study. For example, the number of students of Third Age University in Lublin increased fivefold (from 200 to 1000) during 20 years (1985-2005) [12].
2. The students of Third Age University in Lublin are physically active people and part of them is exercising either in and out of the institution.
3. Age can have some influence on a health state opinion because the group aged 75-84 years was the smallest who judged it as good.
4. Most of examined students are satisfied with their physical form, mostly shaped at gymnastics classes.

## REFERENCES

1. Frąckiewicz L. Społeczno-demograficzne problemy starzenia się polskiego społeczeństwa: Seniorzy w społeczeństwie Europy XXI wieku. Białystok: Stowarzyszenie Wolontariatu Międzypokoleniowego; 2001. p. 20.
2. Polacy żyją krócej od Polek, GUS policzył o ile. <http://news.money.pl/artykul/polacy;zyja;krocej;od;polek;gus;policzyl;o;ile,56,0,670264.html>.
3. Wądołowska K. Polacy wobec ludzi starszych i własnej starości. Komunikat z badań CBOS. Warszawa; 2009. [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K\\_157\\_09.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_157_09.PDF) (30.10.2011).
4. Kachaniuk H. Opieka nad zdrowiem osób starszych. In: T. Kulik, M. Latański (ed). Zdrowie Publiczne. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Czelej; 2002. p. 298-300.
5. Konieczna-Woźniak R. Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wiek w Polsce. Profilaktyczne aspekty edukacji seniorów. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Eurudius; 2001. p. 83.
6. Ossowski R. Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wiek – stan i perspektywy rozwoju: Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wiek – dla siebie i innych. In: R. Ossowski, A. Ossowska-Zwierzchowa (ed). Kraków: Fundacja dla Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego; 2007. p. 35-6.
7. Chruściński K. Narodziny Światowego Uniwersytetu dla ludzi starszych: Uniwersytety Trzeciego Wiek – dla siebie i innych. In: R. Ossowski, A. Ossowska-Zwierzchowa (ed). Kraków: Fundacja dla Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego; 2007. p. 53.
8. Frąckiewicz E. Wpływ Internetu na aktywność seniorów z punktu widzenia strategii budowania społeczeństwa informacyjnego i2010. Warszawa: Centrum Europejskie Natolin; 2009. p. 47-50.
9. Geneza i powstanie UTW w Lublinie. [www.utw.lublin.pl](http://www.utw.lublin.pl)
10. Informator Lubelskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wiek. Rok akademicki 2010/2011. E. Stanowska, E. Tyburek (ed). Lublin: Wydawnictwo TWWP; 2010.
11. Franks H. Starzeć się wolniej. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Diogenes; 1998.
12. Orzechowska G. Young-old Uniwersytet Trzeciego Wiek: Aktywność społeczna, kulturalna i oświatowa seniorów. In: A. Fabiś (ed). Bielsko-Biała: Wydawnictwo BGS; 2008. p. 139-40.

## Informacje o Autorach

Prof. dr hab. n. med., dr h.c. mult. PIOTR KSIĄŻEK – kierownik; mgr JUSTYNA STANIAK – doktorantka; mgr NATALIA SZCZEPANIK – doktorantka; lek. med. MACIEJ KAMIŃSKI – doktorant; mgr PIOTR OKOŃSKI – doktorant, Katedra i Zakład Zdrowia Publicznego, Uniwersytet Medyczny w Lublinie.

## Adres do korespondencji

Justyna Staniak  
Katedra i Zakład Zdrowia Publicznego,  
Uniwersytet Medyczny w Lublinie  
ul. Chodźki 1 20-093 Lublin  
tel: 509 257 878  
E-mail: justyna.staniak@umlub.pl