

THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE AGING - LIFESTYLE OF GENERATION 50 + - LEISURE AND ITS ORGANIZATION

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Key words:

- old age,
- physical activity,
- leisure time.

Abstract:

Human aging is a complex and the inevitable process on interacting levels. The aging of the organism and the following old age is still the least understood of ontogenetic stage of human development.

In recent years, there is increasing interest in this period of life, which without any doubt closely associates with increasing population of elderly people. Progressive socio - economical changes, growth of the standards of living, development and achievements of medicine contribute to the extension of human life, and consequently to an increase in the number of older people.

General aim of the material research is to increase knowledge of the active ageing, in particular in terms of employment, participation in social life and independent living of the elderly and to encourage all to take specific initiatives related to active aging.

THE EXISTING STATE OF KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF GENERATION 50+

Lots of people think that old age is a state of life, in which a person is unable to cope with the basic life activities and constantly needs care from the others. Meanwhile, changes that occur after the time of entry into this period of life does not have to associate with that perspective of old age. Many people just in the elderly time begin to lead an active life style.¹

Consequently, it turns out to be a multilateral analysis of the aging process on the basis of multidisciplinary scientific research in the following areas: biology, medicine, pedagogy, psychology or sociology. These studies are getting more and more important and are the subject of research still relatively new science - gerontology.²

Interests of gerontologists focus on the process of aging and living conditions of an old man and knowledge, which is provided - allows to create better future for the elderly. The purpose of the preventive gerontology is to detect and remove biological and social factors of danger for health, as well as accelerating the aging process. Its task is to release the course of this process, as well as the longest healthy physical, mental and social activity.³

Aging is associated with the inevitable deterioration of health status, cognitive abilities, social and professional competence. However, in recent decades, the changes occur, referring to the constant improvement of the health status of seniors, awareness of their rights

¹ A. Staroń, *Rola aktywności osób starszych i solidarności międzypokoleniowej*, Biuletyn 1/12, Centrum Wspierania Organizacji Pozarządowych, Krosno 2012, s. 1.

² A. Polak, Parzych K., Kędziora-Kornatowska, *Poznawczy i praktyczny wymiar gerontologii — interdyscyplinarnej nauki o starzeniu się i starości*, Gerontologia Polska 2007, s.51–53.

³ E. Kozak- Szkopek, K. Galus: Wpływ rehabilitacji ruchowej na sprawność psychofizyczną osób w podeszłym wieku, Gerontologia Polska, tom 17, nr 2, 2009 r., s. 81.

by the older faction of the population. It is clearly delayed the moment of occurrence of serious disability, pointing out the ability to interact with the ripe old age and good health. These changes are directly related to the emergence of the concept of successful aging, which in recent years have increasingly equated with active aging.⁴

The subjective aspect of aging and old age is an important component of quality of life. The quality of old age is shaped by a life time of the unit. According to Szarota opinion: „People we stand at old age is determined by the quality of our prior life, minimally dependent on actual age”.⁵

Important is: the consciousness of responsibility for own development, continuous improvement of personality, physical activity, health care, training the mind, optimism, openness to contacts and other people problems and — if possible — follow the present times. The uniqueness of human life makes everyone differently if aging is concerned. Man, as a rational human being, should make efforts to avoid old age as emptiness, suffering and the constant death expecting.⁶

Successful aging is „reaching an old age with a small risk of diseases and disability, with a high mental and physical capacity and maintained life activity”.⁷

Krzysztof Juszczak clarified the concept of activity and in his work he writes: „the activity of life expresses human behavior to the surrounding world and his own life. It determines not only potential act, but its implementation. The more sophisticated and diverse human activity in the autumn of life, including tighter expands its living environment, the more increases the range of his accomplishments in the realm of the physical, psychological and intellectual property”.⁸

Retired people and seniors have lots of free time. Withdrawal from working life requires adaptability to changing living conditions. Some of them do not have problems, because they realize that this is a normal turn of things, others may have problems with it because they feel useless, rejected, eliminated, and sometimes even get into the psychological disorders. Retirement may be accompanied by reduced interpersonal contacts and mental activity, sense of irreversibility and useless. These individuals often feel that some period of life is closed behind them. It is not the reason for concern or sadness, because another phase of life is open, in which they can play in society also important roles.⁹

Retired period is the time, when the elderly do not have duties related to work, they can take care of their own, develop their interests, maintain contacts with friends. After finishing professional work, they can develop skills, what makes them happy. It stimulates their imagination and even discovers their new talents.¹⁰

Leisure is not only form caring for own personal needs. Older people, who retire may also begin to work toward improving the quality of life for other people. They are often engaged in the activities of various organizations, foundations and associations, groups of

⁴ P. Szukalski, I. Oliwińska, E. Bojanowska, Z. Szweda – Lewandowska, *To idzie starość – polityka społeczna a przygotowanie do starzenia się ludności Polski*, praca naukowo-badawcza przygotowana przez zespół ekspertów Fundacji Instytut Spraw Publicznych na zlecenie Zakładu Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, Warszawa 2008 r., s. 16.

⁵ Z. Szarota, *Gerontologia społeczna i oświatowa. Zarys problematyki*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, Kraków 2004.

⁶ A.A. Zych, *Człowiek wobec starości. Szkice z gerontologii społecznej*, BPS, Śląsk, Katowice 1999.

⁷ B. Gryglewska, *Prewencja gerontologiczna*. W: Grodzicki T., Kocemba J., Skalska A. (red.). *Geriatry z elementami gerontologii ogólnej*. Via Medica, Gdańsk 2006; s. 47–52.

⁸ K. Juszczak, *Aktywność szansą na lepszą starość*. W: B. Bugajska: *Życie w starości*, Szczecin 2007 r., s. 411.

⁹ K. Banach, *Czas wolny w życiu ludzi starszych*, Szczecin 2007, s. 403-404.

¹⁰ Tamże

support, they can also make new social roles.¹¹ The elderly, can organize their leisure according to social, educational as well as physical needs.

Research study concerning interests and leisure activities show that the most popular is receptive activity - watching television, listening to radio, reading newspapers, most often at home and integration involving primarily meetings friends or help in the daily responsibilities children and grandchildren.¹²

Intellectual activity in the elderly is also of the highest importance. Improvement of mind at old age by learning can make older people feel younger and at the same time much more efficient. Some researchers focus on the leading role of education in the elderly age. As it is rightly indicated by Czerniawska, learning at old age should be a way of life to be open to other people and the world. According to her opinion, educational situations often create life, not just participation in the classic forms of education. Improvement of the intellectual property efficiency can be shaped in many ways. Following forms of entertainment are recommended: crossword, puzzles, mathematic tasks, reading books and playing games with training the mind. Any form of activity that forces to mental effort is accepted.

Universities of The Third Age are very popular at present – as forms of institutionalized education aimed at the preservation and development of the intellectual skills.

In addition, older people often are seen as beneficiaries of voluntary activities. Increasing attention is paid to potential, which include older people – their experience, punctuality and reliability, patience, sensitivity, lots of time and life wisdom. In this connection, the seniors have more and more opportunities to act as volunteers, and not only to get benefit from the work of other volunteers. Volunteering is working for the benefit of people in need, giving a sense of the usefulness and satisfaction with the performance of even minor steps. Older volunteers are met more often in hospitals, hospices, shelters, where they visit lonely people. They also do shopping, read books or newspapers the residents of social assistance homes, they walk around with them on walks, exhibitions, theatres or venues of interest. Volunteering can have an individual or group aspect — gathered in the different Church or secular organizations. That form of activity can be short - term or constant and regular, for example working in kindergartens, centers for work with children.¹³

International exchange of volunteers - seniors becomes also popular, what is financed by European Union funds. The aim of these projects is the integration of EU citizens and the inclusion of inactive seniors in social action. Volunteers – seniors take part in educational activities, activities to promote active citizenship and are involved in international work on environmental education and intergenerational dialogue.¹⁴

Senior clubs are another form of activity. They are simply meeting place of the elderly. It's an informal group created spontaneously and led by seniors themselves. Most Clubs operate on: non-governmental organizations, culture centers, housing cooperatives or councils of settlements and parishes.

The idea of the existence of such clubs is the integration and support of active ageing. In the framework of the activities of the Senior Clubs, the elderly can curiously and actively spend time, organize trips to the output/theater or Opera House, tours, as well as participate in various training (e.g. courses). Many clubs have to offer lot of exciting activities in their

¹¹ A. Nowicka, *Starość jako faza życia człowieka*, Wybrane problemy osób starszych. Impuls, Kraków 2006; s. 20–22.

¹² B. Szatur – Jaworska, *Aktywność społeczna i edukacyjna w fazie starości*, Podstawy gerontologii społecznej, Warszawa 2006 r., s. 161 – 163.

¹³ M. Dzięgielewska, *Wolontariat ludzi starszych*, Starzenie się a satysfakcja życia. Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2006; 261–271.

¹⁴ <http://www.grundtvig.org.pl/odnosniki-podstawowe/informacje-o-programie-grundtvig> z dnia 4.03.2013

wheels and interest sections. Seniors can participate in various training courses, ranging from language learning courses and the use of computer and the Internet, by dancing and singing, and the manual activity. Members do some exercises together, play various sports, walk and arrange tourist trips at open space. They are actively involved in the cultural life of the place, where they live - they go together for concerts, to the cinema, theatre. Clubs events are also organized on the occasion of holidays or anniversaries. Membership to the Club gives, above all, the opportunity to spend time in nice atmosphere and develop their interests and skills.

Participation in music activity is also interesting and great form of leisure by persons at old age. Memorial workshops are also popular, which is the essence of the remembrance of the most meaningful experiences. As a result of the review of the "good" and "important" moments from own past, it's easier to adapt to the future. Commemorative meetings represent tremendous value both for older participants, enabling them to termination of their own experiences and to confront them with the experiences of others, as well as for younger generations, which are a source of great suggestions.¹⁵

A form of activity and some kind of self-help are time banks. The activities of these banks are based on non-cash exchange of services between the participants, in accordance with the principle of "Help yourself by helping others." People say what they can do for others, but they also can benefit from the same assistance. The unit of account is typically time and no matter what, this is the kind of help. The older generation can take advantage of free time for themselves at the same time receiving assistance in cases, where he is not able to manage, by virtue of age or disease.

Physical activity plays particularly important role in maintaining health among the older generation.

Unfortunately, over years of age there is a reduction in motor activity and production of passive recreation. The majority of the elderly physical activity is limited to daily activities such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, homework. Also strong stereotypes associated with the belief that retirement period it is the time of deserved passive rest contribute to reduction of physical effort in everyday life. Meanwhile, preservation of high physical activity in older age can reduce the impact of most of the factors accelerating the aging process, it allows older people to maintain autonomy and independence, and thus it contributes to improving their quality of life in some areas.¹⁶

Physical activity contributes to both improve the objective physical health, as well as self-esteem, it improves physical well-being, increases vigor and vitality, and finally — affects the mental sphere, bringing clear benefits, especially in the realm of emotions, in the form of improved mood, reduced anxiety and depression.

However, the lack of such activity leads to reduction of physical performance and functional efficiency of older people. According to CSO data in 2005 in Poland only 3.6% of people after 65-year old indicated sporting and physical exercise as a favorite way of spending free time for rest.¹⁷ The most common form of spending time by the older people is listening to the radio and watching television (30,2%), reading (15.5%), passive recreation (13.1%), religious practice (11.9%) and work on the plot (8.7%). To such a low motor activity of older people any form of activation seems to be valuable, even in the oldest age groups.¹⁸

¹⁵ K. Baumann, *Muzykoterapia i reminiscencja jako szansa rozwoju w okresie późnej dorosłości*, Gerontologia Polska, 2005, s. 170–176.

¹⁶ M. Kaczmarczyk, E. Trafiałek, *Aktywizacja osób w starszym wieku jako szansa na pomyślne starzenie*, W: „Gerontologia Polska”, tom 15, nr 4, Via Medica, Gdańsk 2007.

¹⁷ *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, Mały Rocznik Statystyczny RP. Warszawa 2006.

¹⁸ E. Kozak- Szkopek, K. Galus, *Wpływ rehabilitacji ruchowej na sprawność psychofizyczną osób w podeszłym wieku*, Gerontologia Polska, tom 17, nr 2, 2009 r., s. 80.

There are however, many barriers and restrictions in the participation of this group of people in physical activity. One can include the cumulative disability resulting from years of neglect in the care of the body or the low mobility of older people as a result of "passive" lifestyle, fear of injury, often lack the basic skills needed to undertake physical activity as a form of recreation or relaxation and finally existing in society standards specifying the appropriate behavior of older people and their fear of ridicule.¹⁹

Exercise programs for older people should take into account the changes in the functioning of the body resulting from the aging process. Knowledge of these restrictions should be reflected in physical activity programs for older people. According to the World Health Organization (*WHO, World Health Organization*) these programs should be based on simple forms of exercise, such as walking, dancing, swimming, cycling or even exercise in bed. The joy of the nature of the exercises is also taken into attention.²⁰

WHO proposes that the programs concerning physical activity among older people ought to take into account the following rules:²¹

- courses may be group or individual;
- one should use different forms of exercise: stretching (stretching), aerobics, relaxation;
- exercise should include forms of easy or moderate difficulty: walking, dancing, swimming, cycling, gymnastics;
- components of exercise should include training muscle strength balance and training exercises — "flexibility";
- exercise should be fun and cause relaxation;
- excersises should be carried out regularly, if possible, every day.

Most types of organized sports and leisure activities are sightseeing, sports and leisure activities systematically and hiking. Apart of the popularity of traditional forms of physical activity as gymnastics and swimming, interest of the new forms of activity increases in forms of the fitness movement, such as dancing or gymnastics in water. Also, popularity of Nordic Walking increases, particularly recommended for older people.²²

Even short walk or walk can significantly contribute to the improvement of the functioning of the body and well-being improvement. Physical exercises are designed to improve the well-being, so seniors should take such activities that correspond to their health opportunities, overall efficiency level of motivation. These factors, rather than age, are the determinants of choice of appropriate forms of movement. The most widespread and accessible forms of individual recreation movement are daily walks regardless of the time of year and weather, work on the plot and physical exercises, all kinds of runs, marches, cycling and swimming.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH MATERIAL

Research area and characteristics of the population.

Tests have been carried out on people approaching retirement age or retirement. All respondents reside in Rzeszów. 50 people was tested and classified according to sex, age and education. Among them there were 28 women and 22 men. Among the respondents, 17 were

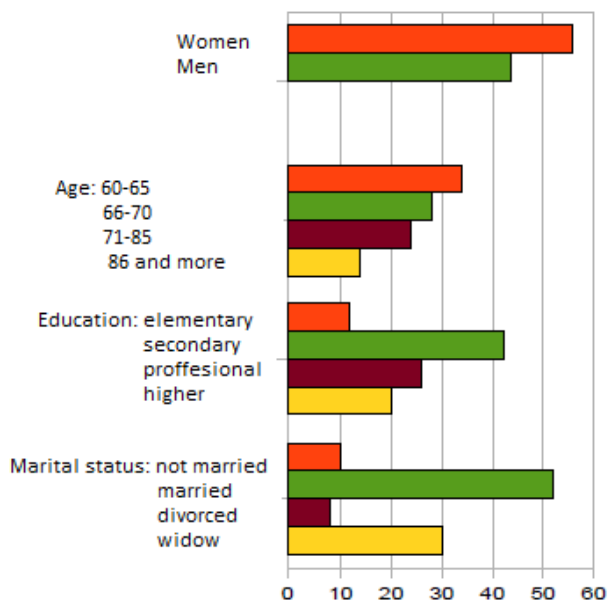
¹⁹ A. Burgess, J. Hudec, *Fitness and physical activity for older adult*, W: Steadward R.D., Wheeler G.D., Watkinson E.J. (red.). *Adapted physical activity*. The University of Alberta Press and The Steadward Centre 2003: 449–470.

²⁰ W. Osiński, *Aktywność fizyczna podejmowana przez osoby w starszym wieku*, *Antropomotoryka* 2002; 24: 3–22.

²¹ B. Wizner, *Prewencja gerontologiczna*, W: Grodzicki T., Kocemba J., Skalska A.: *Geriatry z elementami gerontologii ogólnej*. Via Medica, Gdańsk 2006; 53–59.

²² G. Dąbrowska, A. Skrzek, *Aktywność fizyczna w profilaktyce procesów starzenia*, *Życie Akademickie*, AWF Wrocław. Protokół dostępu: <http://www.awf.wroc.pl/życie/nr113/03-113.html> (20.09.2009).

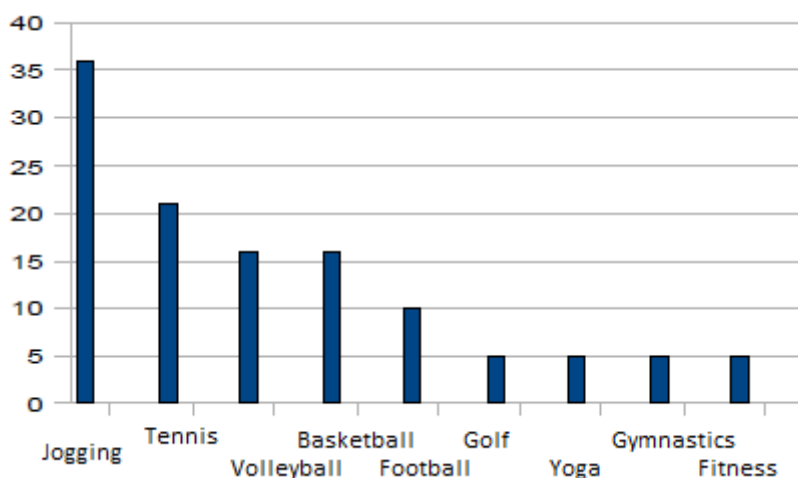
at the age of 60-65 years old, 14 were at the age of 66-70, 12 were at the age of 71 do 85 lat, and 7 were at the age over 85. Among the respondents 6 completed elementary education, 21 completed secondary education, 13 completed professional education, and only 10 completed higher education. 5 respondents had free marital status, 26 were married, 4 were divorced, and 15 were widows. These data is shown in the following graph:



Graph 1. Sex, age, education and marital status (%); *Source: Own research*

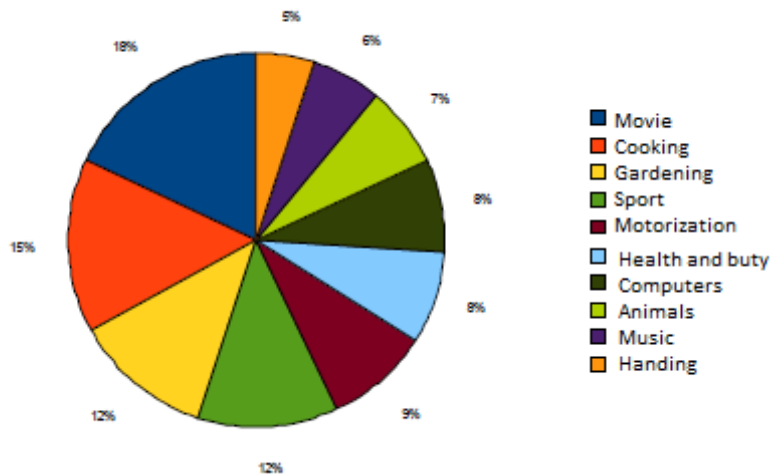
THE PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of research was to examine how respondents spend their leisure. Is the state of their health, physical condition and interest have an impact on the choice of locations and forms of recreation. Among the respondents 25 - half - answered that health problems interfere with the active spending of free time, on the others, health issues are not barriers of leisure activity. Among the people who have free time, most of them have it in the afternoon and in the evening. 31 respondents spend leisure time in passive way, while only 19 active. The most common disciplines are: jogging (7 respondents), tennis (4 respondents), volleyball (3 respondents), basketball (2 respondents), football (2 respondents), and golf (1), chess (1), yoga (1), gymnastic (1), fitness (1). These data is shown in the graph 2.



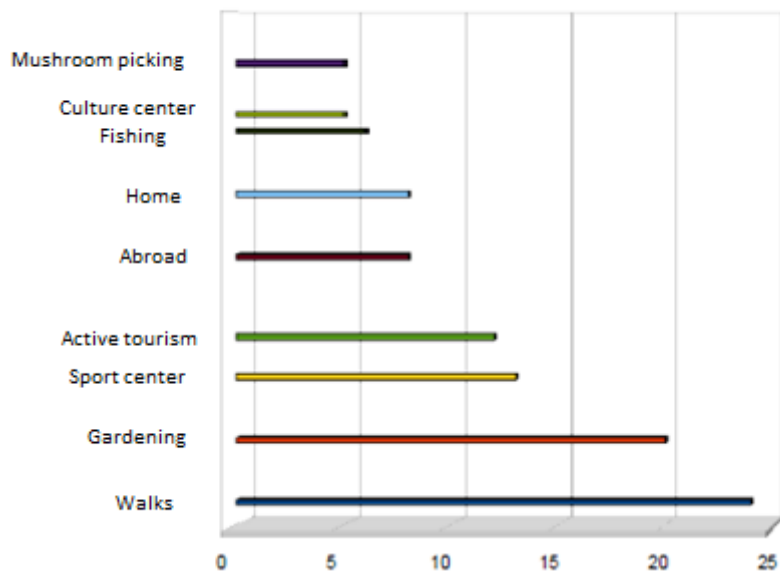
Graph 2. Forms of sport practicing (%); *Source: Own research*

41 respondents claimed, that interest have an impact on the way of spending their free time, and only 9 claimed, that interest have no impact on their leisure. Among the respondents most of them were interested in: movie, cooking, home and gardening, automation, sport, health and beauty, computers, animals, music and hand - making. These data is shown in the graph 3.



Graph 3. Interests (%); *Source: Own research*

The question concerning who they spend free time with, the most of them answer: individually, then with family and friends. Respondents outside the home spend most time: walking, gardening, sport center, tourist exhibitions, abroad, angling, culture center, mushroom picking. These data is shown in the graph 4.



Graph 4. Place of leisure (%); *Source: Own research*

CONCLUSIONS OF RESEARCH

Older people, like young people, or people in the so-called middle age, generally spend their free time in active way. If the state of health is high, people over 60 prefer spending time actively, outdoors, preferring walking and sport. The appropriate state of health is very important, because without it, the elderly are not fully satisfied. However, the studies

show that the worse health and advanced age, in any case, are not synonymous. A lot of people after over 60 years of age enjoy quite good health. It is a myth that older people only sit at home and watch TV, and the only way out of the house is Church. This generation wants to exist normally and use time that they have.

CONCLUSIONS

Old age is a natural phase in life of each human being, which occurs after the period of youth and maturity. It is the result of dynamic process of aging and is associated with changes in the body, which in consequence lead to the deterioration of overall performance and efficiency of the systems and organs, weakening of immune forces, increased risk of disease, limited capabilities and changes in the social functioning.²³

Biological changes that occur during aging, often cause disability among the elderly. However, aging does not always means helplessness, dependency on others and loss of sense of values.

21st century – with progress achieved — for example, in areas such as biomedical sciences, gerontology or geriatrics, gives great hope to the elderly. At the same time, research in these areas prove that the aging process is unavoidable and about how long a man lives and in what state, is not only determined by biological factors, but also his physical activity and mental capacity. In addition, a positive attitude toward the inevitable aging process will allow for a significant extension of the individual's life and at the same time to enhance the quality of life.²⁴

As it is rightly indicated by many authors, the factors that mostly affect aging involution process is passivity and lack of life goals. A man must give character and sense of own life through the setting of higher and higher goals. The meaning of life sense is strongly felt by the people in old age, and its implementation is important from the point of view of psychological balance. Man, who is responsible for the meaning of life will be easier to overcome a crisis of old age. The meaning of life inspired him to be an active, acting source of ambition for excellence and binding of self - realization.²⁵

The purpose of this article was to present different forms of the activity affecting the process of successful aging. Attention was paid to the fact that increasing the activity of the elderly prevents from loneliness and social isolation, retards the aging process, and also allows to maintain the independence of late years.

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²³ A. Birch, *Psychologia rozwojowa w zarysie*, PWN, Warszawa 2005.

²⁴ A. Grzanka-Tykwińska, K. Kędziora-Kornatowska, *Znaczenie wybranych form aktywności w życiu osób w podeszłym wieku*, Gerontologia Polska Via Medica; Tom 18, Nr 1, 2010r., s. 32.

²⁵ L. Zając, *Psychologiczna sytuacja człowieka starszego oraz jej determinanty*, W: Obuchowski K. (red.): *Starość i osobowość*. Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej, Bydgoszcz 2002; 53–112.

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