

## PARTICIPATION IN FITNESS ACTIVITIES AS A FORM OF PREVENTION FROM SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED PERSONS – A REPORT

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### Key words:

- physical culture,
- physically impaired persons,
- social dimension,
- marginalization/exclusion

### Abstract:

**Aim:** The main aim of the study was to inquire and afterward to analyze the possible ways of limiting the stigmatization consequences of this relatively big community of physically impaired persons through their participation in fitness activities like recreation, sports, tourism and rehabilitation.

**Methods:** This study was conducted according to the quality-quantity model, by the use of the interview and survey technique, study of the scientific literature in the field, and the subsequent analysis of the data. The statistical evaluation was performed using the  $\chi^2$  – test and the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. This study was conducted in 2010-2012 on altogether N = 480 respondents from two Polish voivodeships - “podkarpackie” and “kujawsko-pomorskie”.

**Results and conclusions:** Summing up the results and concluding the insights emerging from the study, physical impairment does not mean an intellectual helplessness, or lack of ideas or motivation for the own life, either. It still requires to eradicate the all around existing thinking and stereotypes, according to which the most important and expected behaviour to prevent social exclusion of persons with physical impairments is to take care of them and support them with any help.

## INTRODUCTION

The question of the quality of life of physically handicapped persons has been current and important in our society for many years. It makes us think about the possibilities of limiting and preventing from the marginalization and exclusion of handicapped persons from many different areas of our daily life. Both the study of the scientific literature in the field and first author’s experiences in the profession as a physiotherapist inspired the authors to undertake a scientific survey on this topic. The main aim of the study was to inquire and afterward to analyze the possible ways of limiting the stigmatization/ marginalization consequences of this relatively big community of physically impaired persons through their participation in fitness activities like recreation, sports, tourism and rehabilitation. Furthermore, the author tried to elaborate some theoretical postulates to his developed model with respect to the declared opinions and needs.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The main focuses and questions of the study are as follow:

- What are the attitudes of persons in a different psychological/physical condition toward the need of prevention from the social exclusion of physically impaired persons by means of their participation in fitness activities?
- What forms of participation in fitness activities can effectively support the efforts of limiting the social marginalization of physically handicapped persons?
- Are different attitudes of the respondents toward the question about the participation of physically handicapped persons in fitness activities determined by their individual features or their social features?

The analysis of the national and international scientific literature in the field brought the author to the postulation of the following hypothesis: *Different attitudes of the survey respondents toward the question of prevention from the social marginalization of physically handicapped persons depend on their individual features - on their psychical and physical condition, their place of living and their sex.*

This study was conducted according to the quality-quantity model, by the use of the interview and survey technique and the subsequent analysis of the data. The statistical evaluation was performed using the  $\chi^2$  – test and the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

This study was conducted in 2010-2012 on altogether N = 480 respondents from two Polish voivodeships - “podkarpackie” and “kujawsko-pomorskie”.

## RESULTS

Based on the empiric results gained in the survey it was possible to answer the key questions asked at the beginning of the study. The study revealed that the attitudes of people/respondents in a different psychical/physical condition toward the possibilities of prevention from the social marginalization of persons with physical handicaps were mainly positive. However, they differed strongly with respect to the knowledge, opinions, emotions and declared behaviour.

The main part of the respondents believe that solely personal active participation in sport, recreation and tourism events and active rehabilitation are the only effective forms to eradicate the phenomenon of social marginalization. About one third of the respondents deemed that passive following sport events in the mass media should be sufficient to prevent the feeling of social exclusion. Every fifth respondent meant that personal presence in sport events without active participation, like for example cheering the sportsmen in a soccer stadium or in other games should bring the feeling of community and satisfaction to the persons with a physical impairment.

The statistical analysis by the means of the  $\chi^2$ -test showed that the physical condition of the respondents did not influence strongly their opinions to the following aspects:

- assessment of the requirements to be able to participate in fitness activities by persons with a physical handicap,
- assessment of the missing participation in fitness activities and its influence on the quality of life of physically impaired persons,
- views about the emotional feedback of physically handicapped persons when they participate in fitness activities,
- views about the emotional feedback of physically handicapped persons when they are not able to participate in fitness activities,
- assessment of the obtained values for physically handicapped persons when they participate in fitness activities,
- assessment of what personal/individual benefits anticipate physically handicapped persons from participation in fitness activities,
- ideas about the ways of personal and active support of persons with a physical handicap for participation in fitness activities.

## **DISCUSSION**

The authors Brzezińska, Woźniak and Maj [2007] reported on 403 scientific studies on attitudes toward physically or psychically impaired persons, which were conducted in different countries. These studies revealed that in general there is still a negative attitude toward this group of persons, demonstrated by the rejection of mentally ill persons, and in comparison a greater acceptance of persons with a physical handicap. Besides, they showed a deeply rooted stereotype thinking which even increases the social gap between the healthy and handicapped persons and a still present feeling of pity.

The results of a number of studies that were conducted from 2000-2004 by the organization of CBOS and TNS OBOP, as well as previously by A. Ostrowska indicated that our nation was considerably less tolerant toward persons with a handicap than the West Europeans [TNS OBOP survey 2004]. However, while searching the literature in the field, we came across publications, which quite in contrary to the above cited authors, reported on positive attitudes of many Polish people toward persons with a handicap [Domagała-Kręcioch, Zawisza 2002; Gorczycka 2002; Nowicka 2005].

The results of the study with respect to the respondents' hierarchy of values coincide with the results of D. Krok, which were published in 2010; they describe the relation between the hierarchy of values and the empiric and social aspects of religion. This author postulates that the lower the value of the physical strength and fitness, the greater the focus on the religious aspects of life [Krok 2010]. According to this author as well as N. T. Feather and B. Spilka the above presented attitude is a result of the main message of diverse world religions which preach that their believers should not focus on the satisfaction of their biological needs and gathering of material goods [Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, Gorsuch 2003; Feather 2005].

The values like physical strength, success and self-fulfilment, which are very strongly related to the participation in physical activities, are not acknowledged by religious persons as reported by Saroglou, V. Delpierre and R. Dernelle [2004] based on their studies which were performed in 21 countries.

The hierarchy of values of various social groups was the subject of interest of many scientists.

Some of the popular tools used by them for evaluation of their studies are for example:

- "SVS" - "Scheler's system of values"; it was drafted by Piotr Brzozowski based upon the work of the German philosopher Max Scheler and describes four following groups of values: the hedonistic, vital, spiritual and the holy one.

- „Rokeach's system of values”.

In the study of M. Rorat, which addressed different systems of values of healthy in comparison to physically impaired persons, using "SVS", it appeared that the "holy/religious" values were on the top position independently of the psychological or physical condition of the respondents. They were closely followed by the spiritual values. Vital values like physical strength, fitness, tonicity of the muscles, the resistance to cold, hunger and tiredness, as well as aesthetic aspects of the body shape, were positioned considerably lower in the hierarchy of values.

The question about the influence of a handicap on the development of the individual personality, the features of character, attitude to life, expectations toward the fate and the society, have been absorbing scientists for many years, both in our country and abroad. Among others following authors were also studying this subject: A. Hulek [1969, 1974, 1987], H. Larkowa [1974a, 1974b, 1980, 1984, 1987], R. Pichalski [1978, 1983, 1992], A. Ostrowska [1983], J. Kirenko [1991, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2002], P. Majewicz [2002], B. Szychowiak [1992, 1995], T. Sękowski [1994a, 1994b, 1998, 1999], B. Arusztowicz [1984, 1995, 2000, 2001], M. Rorat [2006].

B. Wright is one of the international authors who researched into the individual and personal aspects like self-perception, values, needs, aims, motivation and expectations of young people with a physical handicap. The author relates in a chronological order to the work and findings of the following scientists: Sommers (1944), Fitzgerald (1950), M. Garelli, I. Meyer and P. Rossi (1961) [Wright 1965], whose insights allow some general assumption with respect to the children and youth with a handicap.

Based upon these authors we concluded that there are some features distinguishing a person with a physical handicap:

- a reduced feeling of security and self-confidence
- a feeling of being less worth than people without a handicap
- a negative picture/perception of its own.

However, people with a handicap acknowledge a hierarchy of values which does not significantly differ from this of people without a handicap.

## CONCLUSION

Summing up the results and concluding the insights emerging from the study, the authors assert that physical impairment does not mean an intellectual helplessness, or lack of ideas and motivation for the own life, either.

However, the intellectual and emotional potential of every individual requires from us a friendly social environment to be able to develop and be used properly. It still requires to eradicate the all around existing thinking and stereotypes, according to which the most important and expected behaviour to prevent social exclusion of persons with physical impairments is to take care of them and support them with any help.

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