

Leisure-Time Activities – Its Program and Importance in the Institutionalized Protection of Old People

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a »report« or preliminary summation of a larger research project and paper. Leisure activities programs and their importance have not yet been systematically investigated in Croatian nursing homes, so this will contribute to a better understanding of this area of research. Through a ten year period of research study of 60 old people it has been shown that by the application of organized and suitable leisure activities we can prevent and redirect the measures so as to continually improve the life quality of old people living in nursing homes, regardless of their medical condition / place of residence. The topic of this paper is very popular in gerontological science. The research applied modern qualitative and quantitative methods of research in gerontology and therefore represents a novelty to the methodologically obsolete methods that have been in use in this country so far, which included polls and simplified quantitative processing of collected data. The results are useful for practical purposes because programs have been elaborated which will serve to improve the quality of leisure time and active life-planning in nursing homes. The foundations for further scientific research have been set with specific goals to focus on the certain aspects of the problems. In that sense, this paper invites all sorts of other challenging hypothesis to come out (e.g. the ratio of intellectual activities, active and passive types of activities etc.) and also opens the door for this kind of methodology in these types of research. This will help increase the number of such types of research as the qualitative methods of research have been disregarded in our country.

Key words: *old people, life quality, leisure time program, institutionalization*

Introduction

The accommodation of old people into nursing homes has become more and more frequent. That is why, among other things, the issue of life quality in nursing

homes has become a topic of discussion. One area that has not been investigated into so far involves how old people spend their leisure time and what is the position/role of the institution when it comes to organizing their leisure time program? It is believed that this topic is one of the crucial factors, which contribute to the life quality of old people in nursing homes.

Psychological, social and anthropological factors of aging are described from the sociological, psychological and anthropological^{1–3} points of view. How both active work and retirement affect the psychological and social state and reactions of old people were analyzed thoroughly. The research also showed how age and activity (engagement) were connected with the interests and motivation of old people. It also focused on different definitions of leisure time.

How the postulations of engagement and disengagement theories related to life's content in old age is also shown. I will try to find the answers to whether the contributing factor to the quality of life lies in accepting the disengagement of activities or in their prolonged engagement. Is flexibility the key to a successful adaptation to the problems of aging? We define leisure time engagement (activity) as any kind of activity that is chosen willingly, regardless of whether it serves some useful purpose or fun. A separate part of the paper involves a short discussion on leisure time in nursing homes and the results of work & occupational therapy in nursing homes are also represented. In Croatia^{2,4}, this area of research has been given almost no empirical investigation, so the majority of results here are based on the hypothesis and experience of professionals working in nursing homes.

The purpose of the paper is to estimate the intensity and content of the leisure time program and to explore how

prolonged accommodation in the nursing home and general health of subjects affect leisure time activity.

Subjects and Methods

The results have been obtained using a sample of 60 subjects who have been living in the nursing home for 10 years (1985–1994), of whom 30 subjects are situated in the residential quarters while the other 30 occupy the stationary quarters. The first group is in much better shape – physically and intellectually. They are also much more independent, while those in the other group need constant care and are of limited independency. All the subjects come from the same nursing home (nursing home »Trnje«) and the representative sample method of selection is also presented. In the second part of the chapter, which deals with the method of research, the classification of leisure time activities has been divided into 20 categories, according to the importance and purpose of the activities.

The most important part of the methodology work is the description of the qualitative method of data collection, which is done by applying the biography method^{5–7}. The reasons for the selection of the qualitative method are also explained. It is the method which least interferes with the observation process itself and is also the one which gives the most accurate description of the phenomena, both in its content and meaning.

This methodology of research has been selected while bearing in mind the insights of scientists from all over the world who had applied the »Life Span Development« biography method^{8,9}. This method focuses on the development of the personality throughout its entire life span. Biography presents a person's life as a whole, rather than looking at it as a combination of segments.

The biography method of research is very important because the person's life cannot be fully observed when that observation focuses on the subject only at the moment they enter the nursing home. Lifestyle and life circumstances have had an effect on a person^{10–12}. Any person's biography and its life course are divided into periods: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. Focusing on those life periods and by connecting them, we can clearly observe interests and hobbies as activities, which the old person has been continually developing before the day they entered the institution. We can also see which of them the person has continued to develop and which is dropped in relation to his/her medical and psychological condition. At the end of every biography a short summary has been presented involving those activities in which the person is now engaged in the institution. A summary of every biography serves to explain the relation of changes in a person's life to the changes made in the selection of the activities. Only the analysis of a biography can explain the change in the nature of the activities during the stay at the institution. As a qualitative example, I will summarize one of the life span development biographies. These 60 subjective qualitative examples were later comparatively quantified.

Example: B. J.'s biography

Childhood

Born in Zagreb, 21.2.1907. Father's occupation: professor (Public school inspector) Mother's occupation: housewife. Children: seven (4 sons and 3 daughters). The eldest brother was born in 1904 and the youngest sister was born in 1915. He attends elementary school in 1913 in Draškovićevea Street and soon after the WWW I moves to the school in Preradovićevea street. The family was a large one, so the parents had to work extra hours in order to cover for the expenses of

such a large family. Despite financial troubles, there was a pervading sense of harmony and understanding in the family. The children were raised in a warm family atmosphere, which accounts for the good study results. B.J. excelled in school as well as in other activities like chess, sports and he was interested in classical music.

Adolescence

As a very good pupil, he enrolls in the I. Gymnasium (a tradition in the family). In the beginning he was excellent at studying, later became a sloppy student due to injustice he experienced by the teachers, so he devotes more and more of his time to athletics, which enables him to travel to Warsaw, Vienna, Paris and Athens. Besides athletics, he's successful in chess. He wins the school chess tournament. He reads a lot outside the school's literature curriculum. After completing the secondary school, a father's friend affects the choice of his studies, so he enrolls the Law University and finishes it in regular time. He then completes the judiciary exam.

Maturity

In the beginning of 1933, he became the judge in Krapina; then, he is transferred to Zagreb. After that he's appointed a judge in Sremska Mitrovica and after that he becomes Public Prosecutor's deputy in Sušak. In the meantime, he meets his future wife and in 1935 they marry. A daughter was born in 1937. When the WWII begins he moves to Zagreb and by the end of the war he has been working in the town of Belišće. In Belišće he was a judicial and tax referent and he also had to do some of the secretary work and teach at the local agricultural school in order to provide for his family.

Syndicates of various companies, Children Home Valpovo, The Communist

Committee ordered portraits from him and they included portraits of Engels, Tito, Marx, Lenin and Stalin. In 1959 he goes to Zagreb to work with the Ministry. In 1952, he resigned and found a job in the Peščenica county. In the period prior to his departure from Belišće, his activities included: chess, sports and oil paintings of seascapes. He also held exhibitions.

Old age

He retires in 1968. During his retirement he worked on insolvency cases for several years and in 1988 he enters a nursing home due to the bad medical condition of his wife. He's been very active and continued to do hobbies he has been doing during his life. He paints in oil and holds exhibitions. He contributes to the creation of posters, occasionally plays chess in nursing home tournaments. This is how he spends his leisure time in the institution.

Summary

Subject's current leisure time activities B.J. is 88 years old. He entered the nursing home with his wife when his was 80 due to her medical problems. He has been in the nursing home for the past 8 years.

Throughout his life his hobbies included athletics, music and painting. As his physical abilities declined he's no longer able to be physically active. Now he enjoys walking or going to the city for a cup of coffee. He still enjoys his hobbies: music and painting, and he participates in the organized activities of the institution by making posters for various shows and greeting cards for holidays. As he prefers to lead a solitary life, he has not made any friends in the institution except for one person. Usually he communicates with that person in the dining room during meal hours.

Research procedure

The possible risks of subjective qualitative data interpretation and ways of minimizing this risk have been taken into consideration. The 60 qualitative biographies have been quantitatively compared and analyzed, which succinctly portrays the final results and serves as a means of control of the basic direction in the interpretation of qualitative data.

Results

Biographies of old people have been categorized into groups involving different accommodations (residential and stationary). All the biographies have been equally divided into the following periods: youth, adolescence, maturity, and old age. A summary of leisure time activities has been added. A graphic display that shows the activities, which the subject has been engaged in for the last 10 years, has been supplemented with a biography. It has been estimated which of the 20 different types of activities the subject has been engaged in and for how long. An individual written statement has been added to this kind of diagram display.

After the estimation of each individual subject and the individual written statement, an activity profile has been shown. The profile is listed according to activity categories and number of years of engagement. Then a separate account of the change in activities is presented.

There is contrastive comparison between:

a) Spiritual (prayer, cemetery visitations etc.) and domestic interests (house pets, gardening etc.).

b) The number of subjects involved in types of activities, listed according to group and age (different festivities). The records of spontaneous and independent activities have been presented in the same way (reading, hobbies).

c) Active and passive types of leisure time activities (any other type of creative work in comparison with watching TV and other passive leisure time types of activities). Graphical displays have been added with along with the column data display. Also the description and interpretation of data has been included.

Discussion

»The discussion« has been divided into three parts: The first part discusses the obtained results regarding the factors of leisure time organization in the institutionalized protection of old people. Difficulties that occur when people leave the family circle or their independent life are discussed along with difficulties in adjusting to the new surroundings of the nursing home. We will also say something about the motivation problems, which occur due to physical and intellectual decline and detrimental effect of the institution itself. We will also describe how living conditions in a nursing home affect its members. They include an institution's location in the city, the proximity of traffic and residential area, the qualification and motivation of the staff.

In the second part each of the leisure time activities were discussed separately. The meaning and special position that each activity has will also be discussed. We shall also state some comments of the staff working in the institution. The possibilities of merging separate activities into a group activity will also be discussed. The stimulation of individual activities (both in residential and stationary quarters) shall also be presented.

The third part will present work done by a team of experts. The principles for the creation of the activity program for different types of people living in a home will be produced. A referential working plan for an occupational/work therapist has been made based on the experience and data gained from the research.

Conclusion

The research has showed that people who enter the nursing home try to continue with the activities they had been doing prior to their arrival at the institution. According to the results of the research, the institution can provide time and room for these activities.

Programs of organized activities do help old people to prolong and improve the level of activity in case their health permits them to do so. It has been proved that the level and number of activities suddenly drops after the age of 60 or 70. This decline is much more radical in people who are ill.

The results, indicating an increase of intellectual activities, are of great importance and theoretical interest when compared to a rising decline in the interest for domestic activities^{11,12}. Passive types of activities are dropping much more rapidly than active types.

Despite the identified general rules, the subjects show great variability, which requires that the organizers of the leisure time program and occupational therapists have a good knowledge of subjects' individual experience and interests. The subjects must be approached individually and many kinds of possibilities must be available for all the subjects. The data in this paper indicates that this type of approach is possible and can achieve results and improve the quality of life of aged people. They are reflected in the subjects' longer period of activity and greater display of sociability towards their peers.

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AKTIVNOSTI SLOBODNOG VREMENA – PROGRAM I VAŽNOST U INSTITUCIONALNOJ ZAŠTITI STARIH LJUDI

SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad je »izvješće« ili preliminarni sažetak većeg istraživačkog projekta i rada. Programi aktivnosti slobodnog vremena i njihov značaj nisu još sustavno istraživani u hrvatskim staračkim domovima, stoga će ovaj projekt doprinjeti boljem razumijevanju ovog područja. Tijekom desetogodišnjeg razdoblja istraživanja praćeno je 60 starih ljudi te se pokazalo da primjenom organiziranih i prikladnih slobodnih aktivnosti moguće je prevenirati i preusmjeriti mjere tako da kontinuirano poboljšavaju kvalitetu života starih ljudi koji žive u staračkim domovima, bez obzira na njihovo zdravstveno stanje ili mjesto stanovanja. Tema ovog rada vrlo je popularna u gerontologiji. Istraživanje primjenjuje moderne kvalitativne i kvantitativne metode istraživanja u gerontologiji i stoga predstavlja novost u usporedbi s metodološki opsoletnim metodama koje se još uvijek koriste u Hrvatskoj, koje uključuju popise i pojednostavljenu kvantitativnu obradu prikupljenih podataka. Ovi rezultati korisni su za praktičnu primjenu jer su razvijeni programi koji će služiti poboljšanju kvalitete slobodnog vremena i aktivnog planiranja života u staračkim domovima. Položeni su temelji za daljnji znanstvenistraživački rad sa specifičnim ciljevima koji bi se fokusirali na određene aspekte problema. U tom smislu, smatramo dobrodošlim i sve druge provokativne hipoteze (primjericice, omjer intelektualnih aktivnosti, aktivne i pasivne vrste aktivnosti itd.) te se nadamo da ovaj rad otvara vrata novom tipu metodologije u gerontološkim istraživanjima. Nadamo se porastu broja ovakvih istraživanja jer kvalitativne metode istraživanja su u našoj zemlji zanemarene.