



Title : Involvement of Elderly in Physical and Leisure Activities: Barriers and Challenges

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Introduction:

An abundance of research shows that regular physical activity supports overall health and helps adults maintain a healthy weight. Research also indicates that the design of our cities, neighborhoods and transportation systems can make it difficult for adults to be physically active. The absence of parks, trails and other recreational facilities, which is a significant issue for residents of low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, also is a barrier to physical activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996.). According to Sallis & Kerr (2006) older adults who live in neighborhoods with many destinations within walking distance and who live near parks and other recreation facilities with favorable aesthetics are more physically active than older adults who lack these resources. A study of 2,723 adult residents living in New York City, Baltimore and Forsyth County, North Carolina, found that adults were 28 percent more likely to participate in recreational activities if there were parks and recreation facilities located within five miles of their home (Diez R et al., 2007). Although the health benefits of physical activity are documented and has shown improvement in functional abilities and has many health benefits that improve the quality of life, most elderly population is less physically active than any other age group (Basia B et al., 2004). The purpose of this study was to examine barriers and the physical activities, exercises and leisure activities carried out by the older adults.

Objective: To investigate the level of participation and barriers to elderly involvement in leisure time activity and physical activity and to suggest measures to increase the participation levels.

Design: A survey method was adopted for the present study.

Methods: A sample of 131 elderly people from the age group 60 - 80 and above years living independently and with family in Mumbai city were interviewed.

Results:

The results of current study showed that out of 131 elderly who participated, 44.3% (n=58) were females and 55.7% (n=73) were males and around 88.5% of the total subjects participated in some sort of physical or leisure time activities. The participation was higher among males (52.7%) than females (35.9%). The involvement of elderly in light / hobby activities like carrom, chess and puzzles was 47%, 38% and 30% respectively, while in activities like reading, viewing TV, writing and cooking was 79.4%, 61.8%, 35% and 33.6%. The participation in moderate to heavy outdoor activity was found to be very low; 16% in badminton, 13.7% in cricket and 11.5% in table tennis. The subjects were also involved in walking (73%), jogging (22%), yoga (69.5%), going to gym (11.5%) and exercising at home (48%) and 9.9% also participated in marathon. The elders were also seen involved in social activities like organizing bhajans (35%), involvement in Social club activities (22%) and 9% were part of NGO's. 73.28% of subjects reported that there are fewer opportunities available for elderly in the city / nearby areas and 85% felt that there should be more of parks, walking / jogging tracks and places where they can participate in sports, games and other physical activities.

Conclusions:

The major challenge is to improve and increase leisure time physical activities for elderly. There is a need to provide appropriate physical activities options for older people, bringing awareness about benefits and interest in physical activities, creating appropriate opportunities and environment free from fears of falls/slips/trips and most importantly providing proper transport system and other easily accessible facilities that would be required to promote participation of elderly in physical activities.
