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## Fitness as an active form of spending free time by women of Tarnów

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**Key words:** forms of physical recreation, lifestyle, motivation, Tarnów

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**S u m m a r y:** Physical activity of women is an important element of a healthy lifestyle, therefore it was decided to diagnose this problem in the group of women living in Tarnów, which is an average size city in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship (Małopolska Province).

The study was aimed at determining motivation and the social and demographic profile of women participating in one of more interesting forms of physical recreation which fitness is. Popularity of its specific forms has been determined and barriers identified which significantly hindered participation in the classes. The study was conducted in 2010 with the diagnostic poll method in which the questionnaire technique has been used with the questionnaire survey used as the study tool.

The age of the questioned was determined in the research, which turned out to be highly varied, from below 20 to above 50 years of age. The participants in the fitness classes were usually women with higher and secondary education. Students and women working in education were dominant in the groups or were in free professions. Most of the participants in the fitness classes were quite well-to-do. The main reason of participation in the classes in case of over half of the women of Tarnów was improvement of physical body and appearance and improvement in mental and emotional state. The most popular form of the classes was BPU in which the highest number of women participated. Women arrived in the classes in the company of their friends or family members. Numerous barriers appeared in practising physical recreation by the women of Tarnów which hindered participation in the fitness classes. They usually were related to health, economy or lack of free time.

The study proved, on the one hand, high interest of women in participation in physical exercises, and on the other hand it allowed determining the barriers which make the above activity difficult.

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## 1. Introduction

Life in modern world, despite many facilitations, needs special care to remain healthy, and that is why the issue of health is recurring more and more often these days. Many studies conducted in recent years show that the Polish population does not fare best compared with many European countries, for example Scandinavian (1; 2, p. 109 et seqq.). Participation in regular physical activities is an important element of healthy lifestyle which is determined by many factors, such as: lifestyle, education environment, income, social status, education and many more. Additionally, participation in physical activities is always connected with free time, that is the time for personal use after meeting all professional, family, home, and educational duties, the time that may be spent in any classes of choice, autotelic, pursuing one's own hobbies (3, p. 39).

Women start appreciating benefits of physical activities more and more often. The now popularised slim and fit body as the ideal of beauty mobilises many women to start working on it. The variety of recreational physical exercises in which women may take part is high, and fitness is one of the more attractive. It is understood as physical and spiritual well-being of the body achieved with conscious and healthy feeding, satisfaction with one's own appearance, taking pleasures and joy from physical exercises, which translates into satisfaction from professional work, good relations with people and active and positive attitude to the reality (4, p. 34). The term "fitness" may be understood differently, depending on the domain of reference. If the microapproach is the point of origin for defining this term, then it is regarded as a feature and attribute of the human body. If the macroapproach is the plain of reference, then we speak of fitness as strategy or lifestyle (5, p. 11).

Fitness means various organised physical exercises with strictly specified objectives and specific methodological grounds, executed most often in the form of group classes with properly selected music and instruments. It features non-sport nature, comprehensive nature (the possibility of adjusting exercise parameters to individual needs of each participant, irrespective of age, current health, or physical fitness), social nature (conducive for social contacts, relatively low price, common availability (a participant is not obliged to have any individual equipment necessary for exercises), universal application (it may be used practically throughout life and this is its basic difference from other recreational or sport forms (3, p. 92).

According to Dorota M. Opoka, fitness as a method of spending life provides physical, emotional and mental flexibility, and it may give the feeling of independence, help reach high quality of life, it releases freedom and natural behaviour, and is a way to generate energy by the human body, develops and enhances power to undertake daily action, and is a means for delaying ageing processes, ensures optimum functioning of the body's organs and systems. Properly functioning body becomes a source of joy of being and helps doing daily activities without much effort. Participation in fitness classes has many values (6, pp. 23–27):

- learning (discovering physical, mental and emotional possibilities of the human being);
- educational (perceiving the value of the body of another, maintaining and developing human relationships, building platforms connecting generations);
- therapeutic (reducing symptoms and eliminating metabolic disorders, fear conditions, chronic fatigue symptoms, a panacea for many ailments characteristic of the modern civilisation);
- preventive (maintaining balance and reducing the possibility of origination of civilisation diseases);
- hedonistic (a source of joy, the feeling of personal happiness and satisfaction).

Fitness is a good form of physical activity in each stage of human life, specifically because everyone may select exercises for himself/ herself depending on age, health and physical condition. Its leading objective is to ensure harmonious functioning of the human body, which is the source of quality of life. For both young and old people, it is the method to learn one's possibilities without exposing to unfavourable side effects. Properly conducted and systematic training includes all areas of personality of the exercising person. The prospective trainee gains many benefits from participation in fitness exercises. It can compensate lack of exercise, neutralise stresses and psychological overloads, regenerate physical and psychological forces, develop the body, personality, social relationships, that is regulate standard daily activity (7, pp. 11–20).

## 2. Research methodology

Considering the benefits from undertaking various forms of physical activity, especially by women, the decision was made to diagnose this problem in the city of average size that Tarnów is.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly known that higher care about one's own health is usually displayed by residents of large cities. It is the result of their higher awareness in this respect, and more expanded infrastructure also contributes to it. Tarnów is the second largest city in Małopolska, now with about 115,000 residents. Several fitness clubs are active in the city area. These are: Studio Fitness Dynamica, Ego Fitness dla Kobiet (the oldest one, in operation since 1985), Studio Fitness Tarnów (Tarnowskie TKKF), Fitness Klub FORMA, Q10fitness & Gym, and Relax Fitness Club.

The study was aimed at determining motivation and the social and demographic profile of women participating in one of more interesting forms of physical recreation which fitness is. Moreover, popularity of its specific forms has been determined and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tarnow.pl>. [online, accessed: 2011-02-08].

barriers identified which significantly hinder the women of Tarnów from participation in fitness classes.<sup>2</sup>

To study the above issues, the main problem was formulated as follows: What is the role of fitness classes in the group of the women of Tarnów?

The above problem may be determined with the following detailed questions:

1. What is the social and demographic profile of women participating in fitness classes?
2. What are the reasons the women of Tarnów follow to participate in fitness classes?
3. What are the forms of fitness most often used by the women in Tarnów?
4. What are the main barriers which make participation in fitness classes difficult for the women of Tarnów?

It was decided that in this study the dependent variable will be participation of the women of Tarnów in fitness classes and the forms in which the women participate, the external conditions will be the independent variable, and the internal conditions will be the intervening variables. The indexes resulting from external conditions are: age, education, profession, sector of economy in which the women worked, income, health condition, company of other participants in the classes, whereas the ones that resulted from internal conditions are the reasons (motifs) for participation. In turn the barriers which make participation in the classes difficult result from both external and internal conditions. They refer to individual preferences, values, needs and health condition. In many cases they are independent of human wishes and needs.

The study was conducted with the diagnostic poll method in which the questionnaire technique has been used with the questionnaire survey used as the study tool, the survey being completed in the electronic format or in the traditional way after the end of the classes. Young women preferred electronic questionnaire survey due to its comfortable filling and lack of time, and the older women rather selected the traditional form, which was due to their inability of operating the computer.

### 3. Study results

The study was conducted in 2010 in Fitness Klub FORMA located in the city centre. It is one of the largest centres of this type and organises various physical exercises which are managed by professional instructors. The proposed exercises are varied in the levels of intensity, loads and forms.

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<sup>2</sup> The study was run and the results were prepared by A. Musiał, the graduate in the Tourism and Recreation, the Małopolska School of Economics in Tarnów, an active participant in these classes.

### 3.1. Social and demographic conditions of participation of women in fitness

The study covered 100 women participating in fitness classes. The age of the questioned was very varied and covered the age range from below 20 to above 50 years of age. Most of the persons participating in the fitness classes—over a half (51%)—are young women in the age range of 20–30 years. Older women constituted a smaller group. Thus, the age range of 41–50 years accounted for 17% of the women participating in the fitness classes and 16% of them were in the age range of 31–40 years. Women in extreme age ranges constituted the definite minority. Very young women, up to 20, constituted the group of 5% of the questioned, and 11% of them were older persons, over 50. The analysis of the study results in the context of different stages of life shows that the most active were these women whose age was within the range of 21–30. Seeking explanation to this, one could believe that the above age group features quite high physical performance, not too high daily duties load, and has high awareness of their own appearance, needs, life goals and aspirations. At the same time, many of them are independent financially and can quite freely dispose of their own funds, as well as the methods of spending free time. It is also interesting that it is at the same time the stage of looking for a life partner, and the place in the labour market. This leads to the belief, propagated in the media, that attractive external appearance is an important attribute to facilitate personal and professional success. The need of taking care of external appearance is thus increasingly apparent in young women. The lower percentage of older women in fitness classes seems to result from the stereotypes, traditional upbringing, as well as the myth of “a Pole mother” perpetuated over a long period of time in this country, that is a woman cultivating family traditions, first taking care of the good and needs of the family, and putting her own good in the end. Such women used to sacrifice, resigned of their needs and ambitions for which they lacked strength and time, anyway. Low commitment to physical activity in the Polish women is confirmed with the study by Barbara Woynarowska and Anna Wojciechowska (8, p. 23), where it was found out that only 6% of the Polish women preferred active forms of recreation (e.g. swimming, jogging, bicycle riding). Beata Maj reports that “despite transformations in awareness, a large portion of the population still observes the belief that an adult woman, from her childhood prepared to perform the roles of wife and mother, should not practise sport. The phenomenon of different social acceptance as regards participation of women and men in sport forms of exercises should be regarded highly unfavourable from the point of view of development psychology. It is the effect of the mother on developing hobbies and rest habits in children which is usually perceived as more significant.” Thus, the active method of spending free time has not only a personal, individual dimension, but a considerably broader one, social (9, p. 29 et seqq.). The method of upbringing women who at present are 40–50 was far from the modern stream of developing social awareness known at present under the name of “well-

ness” (good feelings and physical condition). It consists in using fully one’s own possibilities, pursuing optimum functioning in modern life, the feeling of satisfaction with life, seeking autonomy in achieving one’s own goals, avoiding hazards which degrade health condition. Additionally, from the historical point of view, the “ideal” feminine body was considerably different from what media emphasise nowadays and it may also be a reason why the group of older women constitutes minority only (10, pp. 20–24). Also, the women in this age are most burdened (apart from professional duties) with family obligations, thus the amount of personal free time is considerably reduced. In lack of earlier formed habits, women usually first resign of the activities important for themselves, in which they participate for their own pleasure and satisfaction, all in favour of the time dedicated to the family.

Education is another factor determining participation in fitness classes. As Barbara Marciszewska has noticed, “the choice of recreation and sport services as a form of spending free time by persons with higher and secondary education probably results from more conscious choice of activities undertaken in free time with a view for prospective benefits for psychological and physical health” (11, p. 150). Thus participation in physical exercises is increasing with the level of education. No doubt, in many cases the actual reasons for women avoiding participation in physical exercises are rooted in stereotypes, deep down in the consciousness of individuals. The source of this condition should be found in prejudices, traditions and habits referring to passive use of free time (11, p. 122). The study in Tarnów confirms this finding. It follows from it that majority of the participants (57%) in the fitness classes have higher education, while the group of women with secondary education is considerably smaller (39%). Persons participating in fitness classes and featuring even lower education background, for example basic (5%), are rather exceptional. Thus it seems that the awareness of the necessity of participation in physical recreation is increasing with the level of education. Educated women undertake physical activity more often, and they are more aware and responsible in taking care of their own health.

Lifestyle often depends on the nature of the profession or the post one is occupying at work. The choice of profession is thus one of the most important decisions in life. Due to young age of many of the questioned women, the women were dominant in the studied group who were students and did not start working (29%), thus they had much more of free time. Every one out of five participants (21%) in the fitness classes worked in education or was in a free profession (15%), so this group could to some extent regulate its time of work and free time. 8% of the women in free professions were physicians, 3% worked as architects, 2% were employed in the pharmaceutical entities, and 2% worked as barristers. It is interesting that women working physically also participated in the fitness classes, but they were not too numerous (7%). They went to the fitness classes because they wanted to associate effort with pleasure, music and relaxation, as opposed to what they were doing in their jobs. Thus the concept that the classes in free time are opposed to classes during the work time is not always true, because some women worked physically and were very will-

ing to benefit from fitness, just because this form of activity gave them pleasant feelings. Women hired as unqualified employee/ office clerk were similarly fewer (7%). It is a curious fact that few women participating in the fitness classes worked in very high positions, for example director (6%) or manager (3%). High level of their education, social and financial status would rather indicate that they should constitute a large group of women participating in the physical recreation classes. In an attempt at explaining the above, one could believe that the cause is lack of time, excess duties, responsibility for entrusted tasks, or possibly lack of strong will or established habits, which all prevent drawing effective benefits from directed, valuable physical activity. The unemployed (5%), old age pensioners (4%) or housewives (3%) were a similarly small group to participate in the fitness classes, even though they had a lot of free time and, on the other hand, considerably lower financial resources, as compared with the employed women. In the effort to determine the profile of the participants in fitness classes, it is clear that these are rather young women, studying or working, most often employed in education or in free professions. It thus follows that these are women who have some free time or who can regulate this time on their own. The women in director or manager posts were a considerably smaller group, because these professional groups do not have too much free time, despite their personal and professional independence.

As regards the sectors of the economy in which most of the participants worked, the highest number of women (41%) were employed in the industry categorised in the questionnaire as “other.” This group includes the students (29%) in such studies as: physical education (12%), tourism (9%), pedagogy (2%), language studies (2%), management (2%), economy (2%). This group included also unemployed women (8%), and old age pensioners (3%). A large group were women in the “education” field, and the study showed that they constituted more than one fifth (22%) of the participants in the fitness classes. These were the women related to some of the schools or college facilities which are operated in Tarnów. Work in education features high level of stress, continuous improvement, additional training and learning and conceptual work, which usually means many hours of sitting at the computer. Thus, fitness classes are for this professional group a perfect opportunity for physical exercises, relaxation, elimination of stress and, often, excess emotions. As the above professional group is involved in education of young people, they are expected to have, and—as the study shows—have high awareness of the role of physical activities in promoting a healthy lifestyle. Participation of the teacher in fitness classes certainly improves his/ her attractiveness in the eyes of the youth and constitutes a model to be followed.

Self-employed women also participated in fitness classes, and there were more than a tenth of the studied group (12%). These women managed their own shop (2%), accounting office (2%), architectural office (2%), barrister office (1%), advertising agency (1%), tourist office (1%). Successful women running their own business usually can financially manage to regularly participate in fitness classes, only limited free time or health problems may be their restrictions. Women employed in service and



trade (11%) and in health care (11%) constituted a very similar group as regards their number. In turn, women working in offices and in state-owned companies constituted a negligible percentage (3%) in the whole analysed group of women. This was also true about the tourist area (1%).

Income is another factor which determines participation in fitness classes. Improving standard of living may be observed in recent years in Poland, which is highly important in following a healthy lifestyle. Increase in income of modern Polish women is also noticeable, which translates into financial independence and higher awareness of one's own needs. It also finds expression in the decisions related to caring about one's own health and participation in physical recreation. More and more women allocate increasing parts of their income on improvement in health, appearance, and physical performance. The study of the women of Tarnów confirms this, with the majority of the participants in the fitness classes (65%) being persons with relatively high income. A major part of them (38%) stated the income in excess of 1,000 PLN per month per person in the family, and every one out of three (27%) declared the income from 800 PLN to 1,000 PLN. However, it has to be noticed that women much less resourceful in finances were also participants in the classes. The study shows that it was not a small group of persons, as this applied to almost one quarter of the participants (26%), and their income per a family member was 500–800 PLN. In less than a tenth of the group (9%), this amount was even lower and amounted to 300–500 PLN per person in the family. Thus low income does not always constitute the barrier for participation in the classes of movement recreation, with bad routines, lack of habits and low awareness in this respect contributing to this problem.

### 3.2. Health and lifestyle

Physical recreation is, to a high degree, an antidote for unfavourable civilisation factors such as hypokinesia, improper eating habits or stress. Health, or maintaining biological balance, means reducing the possibility of new ailments that lead frequently to development of civilisation diseases. Participation in fitness classes requires some physical ability, therefore the questioned women were asked to assess their own health condition. It follows from their opinions that most of the studied women (52%) assessed their health condition as good and very good (32%). One out of ten (12%) participant in the fitness classes believed that her health condition is on the average level, and only 2% believed that it was bad or very bad. Health condition is known to be in an important relationship with fitness classes, thus women suffering from serious ailments will not usually decide to practise the above form of physical recreation. Most of the women of Tarnów who participated in fitness classes could boast with high level of health and it is possible that participation in the physical recreation classes helped in it.

The lifestyle is in deep relationship with health, and lifestyle is in the literature a term differently named and interpreted. According to B. Woynarowska, it is “a set



of attitudes, behaviours and a general philosophy of life of an individual or a group. It depends on the environment, the social and cultural standards in which man lives, on his/ her community (or of the one with which he/ she feels identified), as well as personal beliefs, value systems, attitudes, general economy, politics and organisation of the community structures” (10, pp. 50–51). Apart from the broadly understood environment, health behaviour patterns are the element co-creating lifestyle. They may be divided into conducive for health (physical activity, proper food) and risky for health (smoking, alcohol, drugs). Lifestyle has invaluable effect on health, and physical activity is one of the most important factors which affect health, good feelings and quality of human life.

The study proved that majority (59%) of the participants in the fitness classes assessed their lifestyle as moderately healthy, whereas more than one third (34%) of the women declared healthy lifestyle. A definite minority (7%) admitted to having an unhealthy lifestyle. The key item in the healthy lifestyle is physical activity, thus one could believe that quite a large group of the questioned women strive to run a healthy style of life by participation in fitness classes. From the research results by many other authors, one has to emphasise that physical activity of women is a process which should run the whole life in order to keep or improve health and break down involution processes. For example, the studies by Józef Drabik show that majority (64%) of his responding women assessed their lifestyle as healthy, and one third (30%) as moderately healthy, and only 7% of the questioned assessed it as bad (12, p. 257). It should say that the group of the Tarnów women leading a healthy lifestyle is almost 30% fewer than in the results of the J. Drabik’s studies, but at the same time the same (29%) number of persons declared leading a moderately healthy life. The women who admitted to having an unhealthy life were in the identical number in both studies.

Excess consumption of alcohol or coffee, smoking and drugs, as well as hypokinesia or indiscriminate medication with sedatives or stimulants are the factors which degrade human health, leading to many ailments called “civilisation illnesses”. It is also interesting to note that the pace of life, as well as performing many social roles and duties result in continuous haste, pressure and stress which have negative effect on health of women. One could believe that educational actions or advertising campaigns in the media (which more and more often promote physical activity as an important item in daily lifestyle) may contribute to making changes in lifestyle.

The Tarnów participants in the fitness classes were also asked about interest in improving their current lifestyle. It follows from the studies that more than one third of women (33%) were satisfied with their life and would not change anything. At the same time, a similar number of respondents (30%) would readily spend more time on general sport, one tenth (10%) on other forms of fitness, and 3% specifically indicated that they would like to practise yoga. One fifth (20%) of the participants in the fitness classes would change the current diet to a more healthy, and 4% would like to limit drinking, 10% would like to quit smoking, 6% would like to reduce both fac-

tors to the minimum or eliminate them completely. Many of the women in the study have responsible work posts where stress is inevitable, therefore some of them (7%) would definitely limit this factor in their life. Spending more time on rest, especially in the family circle, would be an important change in lifestyle for one tenth of the women (10%).

Healthy lifestyle consists of appropriate food, regular physical activity, elimination of addictions. A rational diet is conducive for health and effective education, it prevents such illnesses as obesity, hypertension, tumours, and positively affects development of proper feeding habits. In the analysis of the methods of feeding in the fitness participants, most of the questioned (69%) declared that they feed properly. Unfortunately, quite a large group (14%) of women do not know the principles of proper nutrition or simply do not follow them, and 17% feed improperly. Often feeding errors listed by them were wrong meal time (3%), little time for preparation of a healthy meal, too fast pace of life (6%) and inclination to fast food (5%). In general, however, majority of the questioned took care about their diet and believed it to be healthy and of full value.

### 3.3. Motifs for undertaking physical activities in fitness classes

The literature describes many classifications on motifs for undertaking physical activities. However, the most often quoted factors related to individual motivation of women are: maintaining good physical condition and health, striving to keep well-shaped body, the feeling of beauty, aesthetics, preventing stress, and sometimes simply fashion. To determine the motifs for participation in fitness by the women of Tarnów, the respondents were given the following categories to select: increasing one's own value, improving the relationships with people, improving results at work/ in the college facility, care about slim body, pressure of the surroundings, the need to relax, relaxation, preventing ageing processes, fighting loneliness, improving mental and emotional state/ need of joy, preventing illnesses, wish to be a modern woman, a form of rest, positive effect on the outlook on the world, the surroundings, wish to meet new friends, a form of fighting obesity, fashion, a way to leave the problems aside, supporting motivation for activity. The questioned women could select more than one category.

The analysis of the distribution of percentage indexes show that over a half of the Tarnów women (57%) take part in fitness classes to improve body and appearance. Most often this applies to getting rid of unnecessary weight and developing a nice, well-shaped body. Another equally important reason for going to the classes, the one with which 41% of the women felt identified, is related to improving the feeling, better mood, increased level of satisfaction, feeling of joy and a higher level of optimism resulting from regular participation in fitness classes. Every third questioned woman participated in fitness classes for relax, relaxation, better feeling (33%) and wanted to prevent involution processes (30%). For a slightly smaller group, an important reason

for undertaking physical activities was fighting obesity (28%) or simply an attractive form of rest in free time (28%).

The women participating regularly in the classes (which applied to almost a fifth of the group, 20%) stated that this form of exercise is an effective drive for further activities, both in personal and professional life. It is known not since this day that regular physical exercises are an efficient factor to release the need of activity and work in different contexts. It follows from many concepts promoting healthy lifestyle that the mind and the body should be regarded holistically, in reference to the ancient saying *mens sana in corpore sano* (healthy spirit in a healthy body).

For very young women, participation in fitness classes is “trendy” and in vogue (19%), and positively affects the relationship to the world and to people (19%). It is also a very good method to stop development of various diseases, including resulting from civilisation factors (19%). Participation in physical recreation is often a method of improving general health, natural resistance, or simply an attempt at running a healthy lifestyle.

Additionally, almost every fifth woman (18%) emphasised that participation in fitness classes has good impact on general social growth of the individual and may improve relationships with people, therefore most of women (70%) were coming to the classes in company, improving relationships and strengthening them. Apart from this, participation in the classes may be a way to meet new friends who follow similar reasons and want to simply meet somebody, not to feel lonely. This problem applies not only to older women, but also to young women in high managerial posts who often suffer from loneliness due to the nature of their work. They are currently named “singles”.

For many women (16%), participation in fitness classes was a good form of getting away from daily problems, with the possibility of increasing self-image and own value. The above reason was used by 13% women. Participation in fitness classes is known to be a good means to achieve a well-shaped body, which highly helps build the feeling of one’s own value.

Every tenth questioned woman (10%) was coming to the classes on recommendation of the physician (7 women were overweight, 3 women had hypertension). Participation in the classes is thus a form of group training aimed at correcting health condition. Other participants in the classes (9%) wanted to be modern women so they were coming to the fitness classes. The opinions of the questioned showed that the classes perform a social role, satisfy the need of prestige, as being a modern woman also means participation in various classes of physical recreation.

A small group of women (5%) noticed that participation in the fitness classes was related to the improvement in the achieved results at work or in the college facility, but this was mostly applicable to students. From among all the categories of motifs proposed for assessment, the least number of persons regarded the classes as a form of fighting loneliness (4%) or was doing it under pressure of the surroundings (4%) or were looking for friends in this way (4%). Fitness classes are used for this purpose

most rarely, as the participants are working people, quite often burdened with family and home obligations, and having not too much of free time. They mostly emphasise getting a slim body and good feelings.

A clear similarity may be found in comparing the motifs for participation of the women of Tarnów in fitness classes with the reasons diagnosed by Zofia Kubińska. In both of these studies, the following were important reasons for participation of the women in the physical exercises classes: improvement of physical body (28%), enjoying participation in the classes (22%), caring about health (17%), improvement of relationships with people (15%), an attractive form of spending time with friends (17%) (13, p. 225).

Fitness classes, if properly selected in terms of type, intensity and frequency, bring about the intended results. They satisfy many needs and are a strong motivational stimulus to keep the developed form, give satisfaction and the feeling of good work done, and help stabilise proper habits and active lifestyle. Thus they are a significant item in the healthy self-study and self-education.

### 3.4. Preferred forms of fitness classes

Fitness allows keeping physical ability and health at a high level for long years in an attractive way. However, to achieve this, the forms of these classes should fit age, physical condition, predispositions, and even likings of the participants. Additionally, presence of positive stimuli (music, team work) makes fitness classes release joy and satisfaction with the participants, allow relaxation, motivate for action and work on oneself. The analysis of the offer of the classes in physical recreation in the Tarnów centres shows a large variety of forms so that anyone interested could find an appropriate form, in various levels of advancement and intensity. The Fitness Klub FORMA, where the study was held, proposes the following classes: BPU (belly, buttock, thighs), Joga Fit with stretching, Senior Forma, Stretching, Pilates (Body Art), Step, TBC (total body condition), Dance aerobic, Dance step, Hi-Lo, Tae-Bo (a fighting form), Multi Forma, Hatha Yoga. The women who participated in the above classes were asked about their attractiveness and frequency of coming to fitness classes was determined.

The analysis of the obtained results showed that BPU (work with weights and small dumb-bells) was the most popular form in fitness classes, and the largest group of women (41%) participated in it, 6 times a month on the average. Physical keep-fit and ability requirements are small here and anyone can meet them. The classes help quickly lose unwanted kilograms. All this makes this form the most popular among the women of Tarnów.

Pilates (28%) and Step (28%) were other attractive forms for the women of Tarnów, although in a slightly smaller scope, and every fourth woman participated in the classes in both these forms. Pilates is a form of fitness which the women of Tarnów used 5 times a month on the average. Its objective is mostly to help strengthen mus-

cles without their excessive building up, releasing the spine, improvement in position, make the body flexible, lower the level of stress and improve the general health of the participants. The ladies over 40 years of age very readily took this form, because it does not require high rate of work. Step, despite being the complete opposition to Pilates, was also practised by the Tarnów women 5 times a month on the average. It is an intensive form of effort which allows burning high amount of calories. Thus it is helpful for the persons who take care about their lines and fight unwanted kilograms.

26% of women declared participation in Dance aerobic. It was practised by the questioned women 7 times a month on the average, which proves its high popularity. Dance aerobic is the form for those who love dancing and good music. Therefore, it is so popular a form among young women. Dance aerobic is in the group of CARDIO trainings whose main objective is strengthening the circulation system. It is a very relaxing form of aerobic which, apart from bringing up physical fitness and burning fat, allows also release of emotions due to combining dance and exercises.

Dance step is a form very similar to Dance aerobic, but it differs in that it is done with a platform (the so-called step). Almost one fifth (18%) of the women of Tarnów favour this form of fitness and participate in it 5 times a month on the average. This form of classes uses elements of dance, e.g. salsa, rumba, latino, funky, afro, with the step. These exercises greatly improve coordination and flexibility.

Hatha Yoga enjoyed similar popularity among the studied women. Participation in this form of classes was declared by 18% of the questioned, participating in it 5 times a month on the average. These exercises stretch and relax tense muscles, tendons and joints, physically improving the whole body, strengthening the immunological system, and providing harmony for the body and the mind.

Slightly fewer women enjoyed the “Multi forma” classes which are sort of general fitness exercises, develop strength, flexibility, coordination and endurance. 13% of the women declared participation in this form and they participate in these classes about 5 times a month.

Few women preferred the TBC classes. It is one of the forms of fitness which consists in work of the muscles of the whole body which allows shaping the body, accelerating metabolism and burning fat in a relatively short time. It requires quite high physical performance, therefore this form may be regarded as less popular. Almost every tenth woman (11%) participated in it, 5 times a month on the average.

9% of women declared participation in the Joga Fit classes. It is a form of classes with physical and breathing exercises which improve health conditions. They work not only on muscles, joints and breathing, but also have positive effect on heart work, circulation, lymphatic and nervous systems and psychological functions. This form is popular among older women (over 45 years of age) due to low intensity and relaxing form, and the women of Tarnów participate in it 5 times a month on the average.

Stretching includes relaxing and anti-stress exercises aimed at stretching all groups of muscles and ensuring good basic muscle tension responsible for flexibility

of the body and coordination. 8% of the women regularly participated in this type of classes. Popularity of this form was low, which could be the result of poor knowledge of the role of stretching in the training. The questioned women participated in the above form of exercise 5 times a month on the average.

Senior Forma is the adaptation training which prepares the heart and vascular system, and the bone and muscles system to effort. It is recommended in osteoporosis, spine pain, rheumatic illnesses, illnesses of the circulatory system, overweight, diabetes, stress. This programme is addressed to women over 45 years of age. 8% of the questioned women participated in this form. Two forms enjoyed the least interest: Hi-Lo and Tae-Bo (a fighting form). Hi-Lo is a form which was practised by only 1 person, once a week. It is a training of high intensity, based on choreography with elements of jumps, jogging and fast marching. It requires from the participants high performance and strength. That is why it is a form of exercises low in popularity among the women of Tarnów. Tae-Bo is an intensive form of fitness for persons in good physical condition—an aerobic with elements of boxing, kickboxing and martial arts (combinations of punches and kicks). Only 2 women from among the respondents declared participation in this type of the classes. It is often selected by men, because it is complimentary to strength training. Thus one could think that this form should not be popular with the women due to its aggressive nature.

### 3.5. Company during fitness classes

Physical recreation as a form of rest has its source in the need of motoric activity and the need of belonging and social contacts, creating good interpersonal relationships. The study results show that the definite majority of the questioned women were coming to fitness classes along with another person. More than a half (55%) of the women participated in the classes with a friend, and 16% with a family member, usually a sister (10%), a mother (4%), a daughter (1%) and a sister-in-law (1%). The rest of the group, that is one third of the women (29%), were coming alone. Thus one could believe that company of a close person is an important factor for the women of Tarnów in motivation to regular participation in the classes. Not all the researchers confirm, however, the necessity of support from another person in gaining systematic presence in the classes. The study by Urszula Parnicka in Biała Podlaska, Chełm, Lublin and Zamość shows that almost a half of the questioned women (49%) were coming to the classes alone, without the need of any company. 27% women needed support of another, a friend, a colleague, and one fifth of them (24%) preferred company of a family member (14, pp. 39–40). However, the residential address of the studied women or the scope of the study could be an important determinant which made the U. Parnicka's study different.



### 3.6. Barriers to and shortcomings of participation

Various barriers were there preventing practising physical recreation in the women of Tarnów and hindered their participation in fitness classes: related to health, economic situation and lack of free time. Other important factors which made it difficult or simply prevented participation in fitness classes included also availability of services, closeness and comfort of reaching of the recreation infrastructure. Various types of difficult situations in life have effect on participation of women in fitness classes. As many as 63% of the questioned women confirmed existence of barriers of varied importance. The other women (37%) did not report any limitations.

The analysis of the obtained study results shows that the highest barrier which limited physical activity of the studied women was lack of time resulting from executed professional work (23%) and lack of financial funds (23%). The lack of time due to family obligations (child care) (6%) and studies (6%), and health problems (3%: spine degeneration 2% and high pressure 1%) was an important cause limiting physical activity of some of the questioned women. For a relatively small group of women (2%), access to the fitness club was a factor limiting participation in the classes due to long distance from the place of residence. All in all, the degree of participation in fitness classes significantly depended on economic factors, conditions of life, health and place of residence.

## 4. Final remarks

Awareness of women increases in recent years in reference to caring about one's own health, external appearance and physical condition. It manifests mostly in modification of lifestyle. The above trends are apparent not only in large cities, but also in medium-size places like Tarnów. Women, despite many barriers and obstacles, try to find more time for physical activity, as they have been noticing that participation in physical recreation may better their comfort of life with cultivation of health, development of strength and resistance to stress and daily efforts. The studies show that the share of the women of Tarnów in physical recreation is determined by many factors, such as age, education, profession, industry and income. This study confirms the common trend that awareness of the necessity of participation in physical activities increases with education. More women with higher education than with secondary or basic ones come to the fitness classes in Tarnów. A definite majority of the questioned are young women 20 to 30 years old. Older women are in minority, which is probably due to the stereotypes functioning in the Polish population and the perpetuated belief that older women are not expected to take part in this type of activity.

Profession, the sector of economy in which women work and income in the family are the factors which determine participation in fitness classes to a very high degree. The studies show that majority of the participants in fitness classes are students, one



out of five women works in education, and almost a seventh part of their group is in a free profession. Some extremes may be found in the analysis of social status of the women who participate in fitness classes: on the one hand there are women at very high managerial and director posts, with high income, independent, on the other hand there are unemployed women and old age pensioners. Both groups are in minority in fitness classes, though, the former due to lack of free time and excessive duties, the latter due to financial barriers. Even though the women presenting high professional and social status are in minority in the classes, most of the questioned are quite well-to-do women, as income per person in their families is above 1,000 PLN.

The exercises require some physical performance, therefore women who participate in fitness classes enjoy good health despite the fact that a major part of them have problems with proper feeding. Mistakes in feeding include wrong meal times, little or no time for preparation of a healthy meal, weakness for fast food. The women reported, however, that participation in fitness classes is a good way to change lifestyle and the current diet.

The main reasons for participation in fitness classes is caring about slim body, well-being, and increasing the feeling of one's own value. It is commonly known that improvement of appearance by participation in the classes increases the feeling of one's own value, and this gives satisfaction and fulfilment. The most attractive types of classes for the women of Tarnów are BPU, Pilates and Step. These are one of the most often selected physical exercises. The study shows that women are very interested in the classes organised outdoors (aerobic, yoga), especially in the spring, summer and autumn seasons. The women of Tarnów who participated in the fitness classes did their best to make it effective, as one out of three questioned women participated in two different forms of fitness, which proves that these are women quite active physically. One could also believe that the group of active persons will be increasing as the questioned women are very sociable and usually come to the classes with a friend, a colleague or somebody from the close family, which is mobilising and encouraging even for the surroundings. Mutual support is a very important factor stimulating participation in fitness classes. However, there are many barriers which make it difficult for the Tarnów women to undertake various forms of physical activities. These are reasons related to economy, health, lack of free time, excess professional and family duties. The lack of the possibility of participant in the classes is sometimes related to the place of residence and the resulting problems with travel. The study shows, however, that the women residing in average-size locations, such as, for example, Tarnów, have increasing awareness of the care about their health, condition, and external appearance. The women treat it as the necessary part of the day and modern life managed at a high pace and in stress, which all requires the proper psychological and physical condition.

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## Fitness jako aktywna forma spędzania czasu wolnego tarnowskich kobiet

**Streszczenie:** Aktywność ruchowa kobiet jest ważnym elementem zdrowego stylu życia, toteż postanowiono zdiagnozować ten problem w grupie kobiet mieszkających w Tarnowie – średniej wielkości mieście w województwie małopolskim.

Celem przeprowadzonych badań było ustalenie motywacji oraz profilu społeczno-demograficznego kobiet uczestniczących w jednej z ciekawszych form rekreacji ruchowej, do której należy fitness. Ustalono popularność poszczególnych jego form oraz zidentyfikowano bariery, które w znacznym stopniu utrudniały uczestniczenie w zajęciach. Badania przeprowadzono w 2010 roku metodą sondażu diagnostycznego, w którym wykorzystano technikę ankietowania, gdzie narzędziem badawczym był kwestionariusz ankiety.

W badaniach ustalono wiek respondentek, który – jak się okazało – był bardzo zróżnicowany: poniżej 20. do powyżej 50. roku życia. Uczestniczkami zajęć fitness były zwykle kobiety posiadające wykształcenie wyższe oraz średnie. Dominowały studentki oraz kobiety, które pracowały

w oświacie bądź wykonywały wolny zawód. Większość uczestniczek zajęć fitness to osoby dość zamożne. Głównym motywem uczestnictwa w zajęciach dla ponad połowy tarnowskich kobiet była poprawa sylwetki i wyglądu zewnętrznego oraz poprawa samopoczucia. Najpopularniejszą formą zajęć okazało się BPU, w której uczestniczyło najwięcej respondentek. Na zajęcia kobiety przychodziły zwykle w towarzystwie koleżanek albo kogoś z rodziny. W uprawianiu rekreacji ruchowej tarnowskich kobiet pojawiały się liczne bariery utrudniające uczestnictwo w zajęciach fitness, zwykle miały one charakter zdrowotny, ekonomiczny lub związany z brakiem wolnego czasu.

Badania wykazały z jednej strony duże zainteresowanie kobiet uczestnictwem w aktywności ruchowej, z drugiej zaś – pozwoliły ustalić bariery, które powyższą aktywność utrudniają.

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S ł o w a   k l u c z o w e: formy rekreacji ruchowej, styl życia, motywacja, Tarnów

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