

# TOURIST ACTIVITY OF WOMEN LIVING IN POLISH RURAL AREAS

Elżbieta Sienko-Awierianów,<sup>1, A, B, C, D, E</sup> Jerzy Eider<sup>1, A, D, E</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Physical Education and Health Promotion, Szczecin University, Poland

<sup>A</sup> Study Design; <sup>B</sup> Data Collection; <sup>C</sup> Statistical Analysis; <sup>D</sup> Manuscript Preparation; <sup>E</sup> Funds Collection

**Address for correspondence:**

Elżbieta Sienko-Awierianów PhD

Department of Physical Education and Health Promotion, Szczecin University

Al. Piastów 40B, building 6, 71-065 Szczecin, Poland

E-mail: ela.sienko@wp.pl

**Abstract.** Tourism, especially adventure tourism, is the best form of physical activity, regardless of age, gender and wealth. It is one of the most important and most accessible forms of active recreation. Although socio-economic transformation in the early 1990s had a profound influence on the development of tourism in Poland, for some social groups tourism is still a luxury. The situation of rural women in this regard is particularly difficult.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the tourist activity of rural women and find out its main determinants. To achieve these objectives, a survey was conducted among women living in the villages of Koszewo, Pęczino and Kunowo (district of Stargard Szczeciński, West Pomerania).

The study showed the increased level of education of rural women and their improved standards of living, clearly reflected in the increased awareness of healthy leisure activities. Analysis of ways of spending vacations by women living in rural areas showed that it depended on their economic activity but not on education. Going abroad for vacations and frequency of trips outside the place of residence depended on both education and economic activity of the surveyed women.

**Key words:** tourism, free time, rural women, surveys

## Introduction

Physical activity is an irreplaceable component of a healthy lifestyle and one of the basic human needs. Tourism, especially adventure tourism associated with trekking, skiing, biking, kayaking, sailing etc., is one of the best forms of physical activity regardless of age, gender and level of wealth. It is also one of the most important and most accessible forms of active recreation (Łobożewicz and Bińczyk 2001). Thanks to its significant cognitive and educational values, it has become a recognized and recommended antidote to risk factors associated with modern civilization (Gaworecki 2000). Dating back to the ancient times, in modern times tourism has become truly popular all over the world and is still growing in popularity.

Tourism and recreation are essential elements of the human life, embracing social, biological and economic aspects of life. They are associated with the hierarchies of values, mandatory rules and behaviors. Despite their strong personal dimension, they also take place in the context of the educational pattern. The choice of this pattern

is determined by age; not only because of the changing mental and physical abilities, but also as a consequence of specific conditions at the particular time of one's life (Toczek-Werner 2007). The educational functions of tourism and recreation consist in their influence on the attitudes towards the world. Awareness seems to be most crucial. Parents – especially the mother, with whom the child spends the first years of its life – show the world to their children and their attitude is most crucial for shaping the knowledge of the world in the young person's mind. The positive attitude towards tourism results in pro-social behaviours and plays a significant role in shaping the young person's sensitivity (Wolańska and Łobożewicz 1994).

Tourist and recreational activity can be part of self-realization. However, as a result of economic and social development, and the associated increase in the wealth of society, human needs are being reevaluated. What was once considered a luxury or higher order good is now considered a primary or even lower order good. Contemporary tourism is no exception (Bieńczyk and Łobożewicz 2001).

Although socio-economic transformation in Poland in the early 1990s had a huge impact on the development of domestic tourism, it is still a luxury for some social groups. This includes a considerable number of Poles living in rural areas, which were especially affected by the economic transformation. Their development is limited by the insufficient level of education, lower aspirations, poor access to the labour market and lower standards of living, at least in some parts of the country (Rządowy program... 2006).

Rural women are in a particularly difficult situation. Family responsibilities, taking care of children or the elderly due to the lack of appropriate number of education and care institutions, and work on a family farm, significantly constraint the activity of women living in rural areas. In addition, rural women are often not prepared to perform public roles (occupational, political etc.), with no role models in their nearest surroundings (Krzyszowski 2008).

The aim of this study was to evaluate the tourist activity of women living in rural areas and establish its main determinants. Such research on healthy behaviours, including physical activity, seems to be an important aspect of assessing the health of the entire population and the basis for planning health education and preparing health promotion projects.

## Material and methods

The material consisted of data obtained from 53 women in May 2012. The participants came from three villages in the district of Stargard Szczeciński in Western Pomerania: Koszewo, Pęzino and Kunowo. The study population included adult women, mainly aged 26–40 years (43.4%) and below 25 years of age (26.4%). The study complied with the guidelines set out in the ethics policy of the Szczecin University (Kruk 2013).

The diagnostic survey method (questionnaire) was used as the method of collecting data (Pilch and Bauman 2010). The questionnaire included closed and semi-open questions designed to collect specific data. The first part of the questionnaire addressed socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. In the second part, questions referred to the respondents' tourist activity. The questionnaire was filled in anonymously.

The research method was used to obtain the information on the intensity, nature, determinants and consequences of the phenomenon under study and, consequently, to identify its causes and the direction of change (Pilch and Bauman 2010). The obtained data were statistically analyzed. The  $\chi^2$  test was used to demonstrate the relationships between the way of spending holidays or vacation, travelling abroad, the frequency of visits, and the education and economic activity of surveyed women (Stanisz 2006).

## Results

The results of surveys conducted among women living in rural areas are shown in Table 1.

The majority of the study population was represented by women aged 26–40 years (43.4%), with secondary (46.4%) and vocational education (26.8%). Primary and university education was reported by a minority (7.1% and 19.6%, respectively). The respondents were mainly married (almost 57%) and never married (approx. 32%). 28.3% women were without children, 22.6% had two children, 20.8% had one child, 17.0% had three children and 11.3% had at least four children.

The vast majority of women, more than 81%, reported their subjective financial situation of the family as good, 11.3% believed their financial situation was very good and only 7.6% described it as bad.

Half (50.0%) of the women worked, 25.0% were students, 10.7% did not work, 10.7% were registered as unemployed, while less than 4.0% were retired or received disability pensions.

Considering the tourist activity of women surveyed, it was found that 33.9% of women left their place of residence at least once a year, 42.8% travelled several times a year, and 17.8% travelled less than once a year.

As many as 37.8% did not go anywhere during the previous summer, the same share of respondents spent their previous summer on holidays or trips with the family, and about 15.0% worked at the time, while less than 10.0% of women visited their families during their summer vacations.

Over 77.0% of the respondents reported at least one foreign trip in their lifetime. By far, Germany and the Czech Republic were the most popular destinations. Foreign trips were most frequently spent together with their families. Less than 23.0% of respondents had never left Poland, mostly for financial reasons.

Analysis of mountain hiking revealed that the majority of the surveyed women living in rural areas (71.7%) had been in the mountains, but only a few (15.1%) practiced winter sports (skiing or snowboarding).

**Table 1.** The results of surveys conducted among women living in rural areas

No.	Question	Answers	Total (%)
1	2	3	4
1.	Age	<25 years	26.40
		26–40 years	43.40
		41–55 years	28.30
		>55 years	1.90
2.	Education	Primary	7.14
		Vocational	26.79
		Secondary	46.43
		Tertiary	19.64
3.	Marital status	Never married	32.00
		Married	56.60
		Divorced	5.70
		Widow	1.90
		In an unofficial relationship	3.80
4.	Number of children	0	28.30
		1	20.80
		2	22.60
		3	17.00
		4 and more	11.30

1	2	3	4
5.	Financial situation	Bad	7.60
		Good	81.10
		Very good	11.30
6.	Economic activity	student	25.00
		employed	50.00
		disability pension	1.79
		retirement pension	1.79
		not working	10.71
		unemployed	10.71
7.	How did you spend your last summer holidays?	at home	37.80
		on a trip	37.70
		visiting my family	9.40
		other	15.10
8.	Have you ever been abroad?	yes	77.40
		no	22.60
9.	Have you ever been to the mountains?	yes	71.70
		no	28.30
10.	Do you practice winter sports (skiing, snowboarding)?	yes	15.10
		no	84.90
11.	How often do you leave your place of residence?	once a year	33.93
		a few times a year	46.43
		once in a few years	12.50
		never	1.80
		other	5.36

We used the chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to find the existence of the following relationships in the groups of surveyed rural women:

- way of spending holidays vs. education and economic activity,
- foreign trips vs. education and economic activity,
- frequency of trips vs. education and economic activity.

The assessment was made with the probability of type 1 error equal to 0.05.

On the basis of calculations, it was found that:

1. The way of spending holidays did not depend on education ( $\chi^2 = 27.646$ ; for 9 degrees of freedom). However, it depended on economic activity ( $\chi^2 = 21.375$ ; for 15 degrees of freedom).

2. Going abroad depended on education ( $\chi^2 = 7.785$ ; for 3 degrees of freedom) and economic activity ( $\chi^2 = 3.773$ ; for 5 degrees of freedom).

3. The frequency of trips depended on education ( $\chi^2 = 15.532$ ; for 12 degrees of freedom) and economic activity ( $\chi^2 = 15.558$ ; for 20 degrees of freedom).

Tables 2–7 show the percentage of answers to questions about the type of trips, foreign trips and the number of trips in relation to the education and economic activity of the respondents.

**Table 2.** Manner of spending summer vacations vs. the education of the surveyed rural women (%)

No.	How did you spend your last summer vacations?	Education				Total
		primary	vocational	secondary	tertiary	
1.	at home	0.00	18.87	15.09	3.77	37.74
2.	on a trip/at a resort	1.89	3.77	18.87	13.21	37.74
3.	visiting family	3.77	1.89	1.89	1.89	9.43
4.	other	0.00	1.89	13.21	0.00	15.09
Total		5.66	26.42	49.06	18.87	100.00

**Table 3.** Manner of spending summer vacations vs. the economic activity of the surveyed rural women (%)

No.	How did you spend your last summer vacations?	Economic activity						Total
		student	working	disability pension	retired	non-working	unemployed	
1.	at home	3.57	26.79	1.79	0.00	3.57	1.79	37.50
2.	on a trip/at a resort	8.93	16.07	0.00	1.79	7.14	5.36	39.29
3.	visiting family	0.00	3.57	0.00	0.00	1.79	3.57	8.93
4.	other	8.93	3.57	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.79	14.29
Total		21.43	50.00	1.79	1.79	12.50	12.50	100.00

**Table 4.** Foreign trips of the surveyed rural women vs. their education (%)

No.	Have you ever been abroad?	Education				Total
		primary	vocational	secondary	tertiary	
1.	yes	1.89	16.98	39.62	18.87	77.36
2.	no	3.77	9.43	9.43	0.00	22.64
Total		5.66	26.42	49.06	18.87	100.00

**Table 5.** Foreign trips of the surveyed rural women vs. their economic activity (%)

No.	Have you ever been abroad?	Economic activity						Total
		student	working	disability pension	retired	non-working	unemployed	
1.	yes	19.64	37.50	1.79	1.79	7.14	8.93	76.79
2.	no	1.79	12.50	0.00	0.00	5.36	3.57	23.21
Total		21.43	50.00	1.79	1.79	12.50	12.50	100.00

**Table 6.** The frequency of trips vs. the education of the surveyed rural women (%)

No.	How often do you leave your place of residence?	Education				Total
		primary	vocational	secondary	tertiary	
1.	once a year	3.57	5.36	17.86	7.14	33.93
2.	a few times a year	0.00	12.50	19.64	10.71	42.86
3.	once in a few years	1.79	7.14	5.36	0.00	14.29
5.	never	1.79	1.79	0.00	0.00	3.57
6.	other	0.00	0.00	3.57	1.79	5.36
Total		7.14	26.79	46.43	19.64	100.00

**Table 7.** Frequency of trips vs. the economic activity of the surveyed rural women (%)

No.	How often do you leave your place of residence?	Economic activity						Total
		student	working	disability pension	retired	non-working	unemployed	
1.	once a year	0.00	21.43	1.79	0.00	5.36	5.36	33.93
2.	a few times a year	16.07	17.86	0.00	1.79	3.57	3.57	42.86
3.	once in a few years	3.57	7.14	0.00	0.00	1.79	1.79	14.29
5.	never	1.79	1.79	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.57
6.	other	3.57	1.79	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.36
	Total	25.00	50.00	1.79	1.79	10.71	10.71	100.00

## Discussion

Tourism, recreation, physical activity and leisure culture are an important link in the process of education and an effective method of socialization. Patterns learned at the family home are reflected later in the adult life; they are the basis for developing healthy behaviours in this area of human life. However, these values can be quite different and assume different forms, depending on the particular stage in human life. In addition, one spends one's free time depending on current social and living conditions.

One of the primary functions of the family is the preservation of a healthy lifestyle. A healthy family cares about the health of its members and motivates them to stay fit. Its daily life should include recreation, tourism and physical activity (Wolańska and Łobożewicz 1994). Special role here is played by the mother, with whom child usually spends most of its earliest year of life. Her preferred forms of physical and recreational activity will have a significant impact on the physical activity of the child.

The situation of rural families, particularly women, is much more difficult than that of the residents of larger urban agglomerations. This is due to the specificity of rural areas. One of the most alarming symptoms is the progressive exclusion of rural areas in terms of cultural, economic and social life. Traditional civilizational backwardness of Polish rural areas has been strengthened by the processes of political transformation, which became the cause of many negative effects, including high unemployment and consequently a significant impoverishment of the rural population (Halamska 2007). Fortunately, one of the main objectives of rural development policy pursued by the European Union is to improve the quality of life in rural areas and promote diverse business activities *Dziennik Urzędowy Unii Europejskiej. Rezolucja Parlamentu Europejskiego z dnia 12 marca 2008 r. w sprawie sytuacji kobiet na obszarach wiejskich UE (2007/2117(INI)) (2009/C 66 E/04)*.

In addition, Poland, similar to other post-communist countries, is experiencing a complex process of shaping new relationships between men and women. The traditional pattern has been based on the exclusion of women from the public sphere and confining their activity to the private sphere, justified by the biological differences between sexes and the related functional division of social roles (Fuszara 2002).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development developed a *Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013*, including *Measure 3.3 Renewal and development of rural areas*. Its aim is to create conditions for socio-economic development of rural areas and revitalize rural population by improving the quality of life and work in rural areas, increase the attractiveness of tourism and investment in rural areas, satisfying the social and cultural needs

of rural residents, cultivating the identity of rural communities, preservation of cultural heritage and specificity of rural areas and the promotion of rural areas (Ministry of Education).

The results of our survey are partly optimistic. In recent years the level of education of women living in rural areas has significantly increased and their standard of living has improved. Only 7.5% of respondents identified their financial situation as bad. Educated and more conscious women are better equipped to perform different social roles. The role of mother and raising children is increasingly often consciously chosen and planned. In addition, having children is no longer an end in itself. Family planning is used for the proper development of children and to meet all their needs: educational, developmental and social, also ensuring conditions for leisure activities in a manner conducive to development and health. This increased awareness is clearly seen in the responses of the surveyed rural women. Almost 34% of respondents leave their place of residence for vacations at least once a year, and more than 43% do it several times a year. These are mostly family trips.

However, analysis of leisure activities among the surveyed rural women is not so optimistic. Unfortunately, it was mostly passive recreation. This shows the need for disseminating knowledge about the healthy ways of spending free time. Yet consciousness itself is insufficient; there is also a need for conditions conducive to appropriate health habits and physical development.

## Conclusions

The results of the survey lead to the following conclusions:

1. In recent years, the increased level of education of rural women and improved standards of living has been reflected in the increased awareness in terms of leisure activities beneficial for physical development and health.
2. The frequency of tourist trips among surveyed rural women was satisfactory, but most of them did not show preference for active recreation.
3. The forms of vacations of the surveyed rural women depended on their economic activity but not their education. On the other hand, trips abroad and the frequency of trips outside the place of residence depended both on the education and economic activity of the surveyed rural women.

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