



FITNESS FOR OVERWEIGHT PEOPLE: REALITY AND PROSPECTS

A. Dimitrova*

Department of Psychology, Pedagogy and Sociology, Faculty of Pedagogy, National Sports Academy
„Vassil Levski“, Sofia, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

Fitness sport is aimed at good health, physical and spiritual condition. In this sense, fitness activities are a good opportunity as prevention against immobility and overweight, which is a social and medical problem, a pandemic of the metabolic syndrome, which affects all social strata of modern Bulgarian society. The aim of the empirical sociological-marketing research is to establish the possibilities for improving a target-oriented program combining balanced nutrition and fitness activities for a special target group - overweight people. To solve the main tasks, achieve the goal and prove the hypothesis, a complex methodology was applied: from the study of literary, statistical and normative sources, discussion, observation, survey method, expert evaluation and content analysis. Based on an in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative data in several metropolitan fitness clubs, the respondents' attitudes towards the service "fitness for overweight people" and the motives influencing attendance of the fitness centre by overweight people are investigated. The obtained results serve as the basis of a strategy for optimizing the "fitness for overweight people" service and generating profit. Conclusion: a complex and interdisciplinary approach is needed to solve the specific social problems and the coordinated efforts of the whole society.

Key words: sociology of sport, healthy lifestyle, prevention

INTRODUCTION

The greatest value of a country is its people - their health, mental and physical condition. One of the means to achieve these goals is sport - an activity, experience or business venture focused on fitness, recovery, sports or leisure (1), and according to the European Charter for Sport is "any form of physical activity which, through organized or unorganized participation aims at the expression or improvement of physical and mental fitness, the development of social relationships or the achievement of sporting results at all levels" (2).

In general, the concept of fitness is perceived as a symbol of good health and fitness, physical and mental capacity (3). In fitness activities, there is motor activity, combining exercises from different types of sports. What is new and rational in the fitness form of the sport is that it allows a new multiplied option of playing sports and a huge sports-technical diversity to achieve results that the individual himself determines, i.e. the variability and selection of programs are self-controlled depending on the goal and human needs. Fitness sport is mainly aimed not at achieving high sports results and mastery, but at good health, physical and spiritual condition (4). In this sense, fitness activities are an opportunity for prevention against immobility and overweight, which is a social and medical problem, a pandemic of the metabolic syndrome, which affects all social strata of modern Bulgarian society. 61.7% of Bulgarians are overweight,

*Correspondence to: *Albena Dimitrova, Department of Psychology, pedagogy and sociology, Faculty of Pedagogy, National Sports Academy „Vassil Levski“, 1700, Sofia, Bulgaria, Studentski grad, "Acad. Stefan Mladenov" 21, e-mail: albena_dimitrova.nsa@abv.bg, Mobile: +359 893 396 370*

according to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), presented at a press conference in BTA on the occasion of World Obesity Day. By 2025, over 400,000 Bulgarians will be obese. This was announced by specialists from the Bulgarian Association for the Study of Obesity and its Associated Diseases (5). According to statistics, 58.67% of people in Europe are overweight, and 59.35% in the EU. (6). Data from the European Association for the Study of Obesity report that it is the fifth leading cause of death worldwide leading to over 195 complications, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, various cancers, reproductive problems, a risk factor for more severe of COVID-19. Every year, about 7% of the national budget of EU countries goes to cover health costs related to obesity, or about 70 million euros in total (7). Decreased physical activity, overweight and improper nutrition affect physical performance, and hence quality of life (8).

One of the serious problems facing modern society is the creation of the necessary prerequisites and conditions, technologies and mechanisms for integrating sports in free time with health care - two social systems whose main goal is human health (9).

Hypothesis: I assume that in the process of the research, leading factors for developing and optimizing the "fitness for overweight people" service will be registered in several metropolitan fitness clubs.

The aim of the empirical sociological-marketing research is to establish the possibilities for improving a target-oriented program combining balanced nutrition and fitness activities for a special target group - overweight people.

The following main tasks arise from this goal:

- to reveal the features of a goal-oriented program "fitness for overweight people";
- to establish the attitude of users towards fitness activities, combining proper regime and special procedures in the fight against extra pounds;

- to analyse the expert opinion on increasing attendance in gyms and to optimize the service;
- to draw conclusions and recommendations for theory and practice.

METHODS

The subject of the study is a goal-oriented program for a special target group - overweight people. The object of the conducted empirical sociological-marketing research are 60 respondents using various services in the fitness club "JK Fitness", 60% women and 40% men, and 40 experts from "JK Fitness", "Sport City", "Studio Gio - Power plate and TRX", equal numbers of men and women. Of them, 57.7% are aged 31 - 40, and the highest percentage is the group of instructors with experience between 6 and 10 years - 53.8%. With regard to the position they perform in the gym - 57.7 percent of the respondents indicate that they are fitness instructors, 23.1% are personal trainers and 19.2% combine the two positions. To solve the main tasks, achieve the goal and prove the hypothesis, a complex methodology was applied: from the study of literary, statistical and normative sources, discussion, observation, survey method, expert evaluation and content analysis. Specially developed cards were used: questionnaire (15 questions) and expert (10 questions).

The scientific study was conducted in the period from October 2022 to May 2023.

RESULTS

The data were subjected to mathematical-statistical processing with the power of the SPSS program (10, 11). The obtained results were processed by calculating absolute and relative frequency in unidimensional and multidimensional data distribution.

On the basis of an expert assessment in the analysis of the obtained results, I focused my attention on some basic questions related to the researched issues.

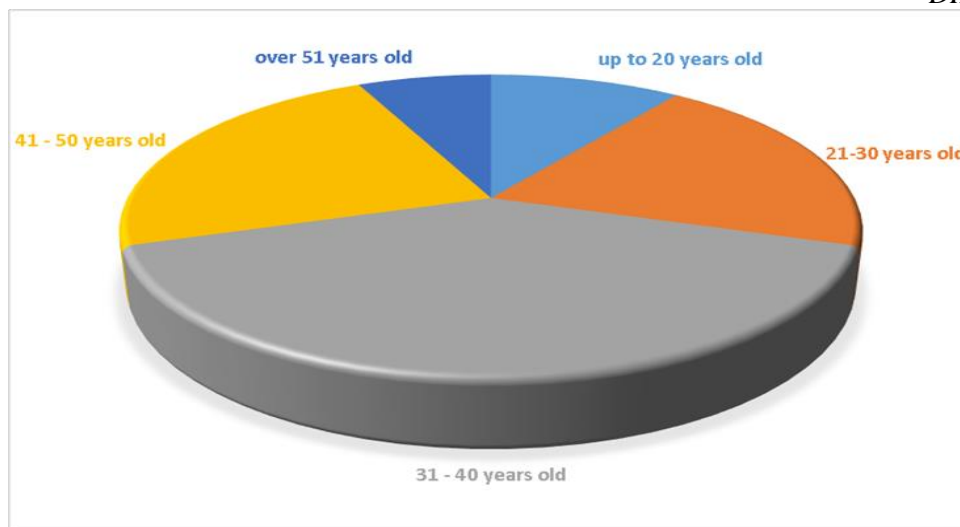


Figure 1. How old are you?

The age group 31 - 40 years old most often use the wide range of services offered by the centre. It is noteworthy that only 10% of people under the age of 20 visit the gym and only 20% of those aged 21- 30. The study did not include a single unemployed person, 65% of the respondents were on a permanent income, working (37.5 % are employees in a private company and 27.5% work in the public sector) and can be defined as potential users of fitness services. For the remaining 35%, which includes learners and students, preferences can be offered to stimulate attendance.

65% of the respondents stated that they have no weight problems. 35 percent give a positive answer, 1/3 do not do sports. In Bulgaria,

according to data from a special survey of Eurobarometer 525 "Sports and physical activity", 61% of the interviewees have never played active sports (12), which confirms the sedentary lifestyle of a large part of Bulgarian citizens during the period under review. Up to 45% of Europeans currently do no sports or physical activity at all. Although this represents a stabilization of the trend compared to the 2017 Eurobarometer survey, continued promotion of sport and physical activity is clearly still very much needed. The study also shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, half of Europeans have reduced their activity levels or even stopped altogether (12), and the harms caused affect every aspect of life (13).

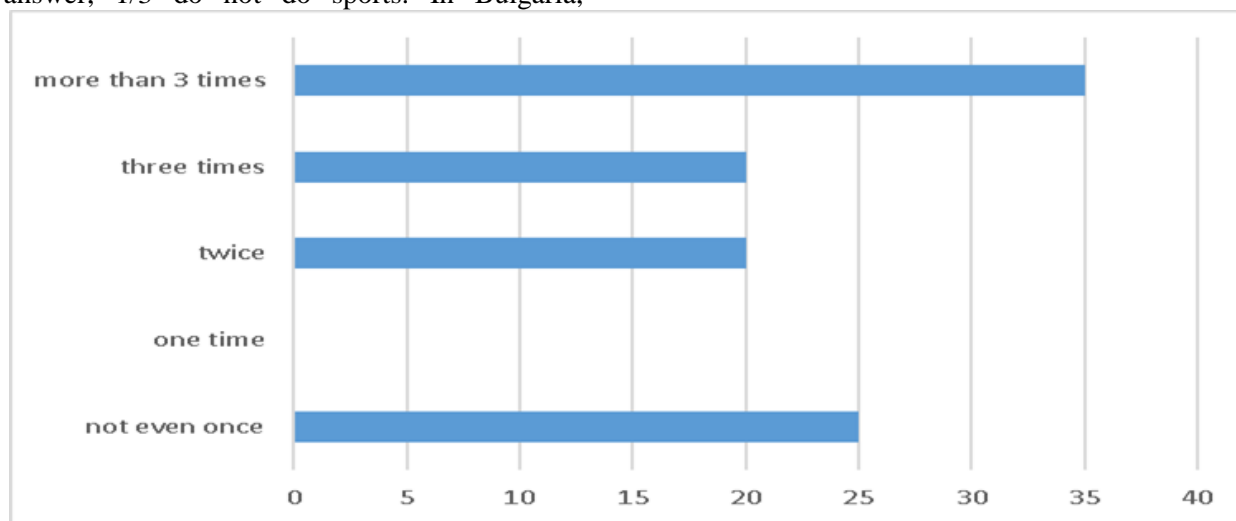


Figure 2. In the last month, how many times did you go to the gym?

35% of respondents indicated that they visited a gym more than 3 times within 1 month. In terms of percentage, there is an answer in the opposite pole - 25% indicated the answer "not once" and none of the respondents indicated "once". The results show that such inconsistency and random visits would not lead to the desired result.

The fifth Eurobarometer survey on sport and physical activity, based on responses from 26 580 Europeans from all 27 Member States, shows that 38% of Europeans do physical exercise or sport at least once a week or more, and 17% more less than once a week (14).

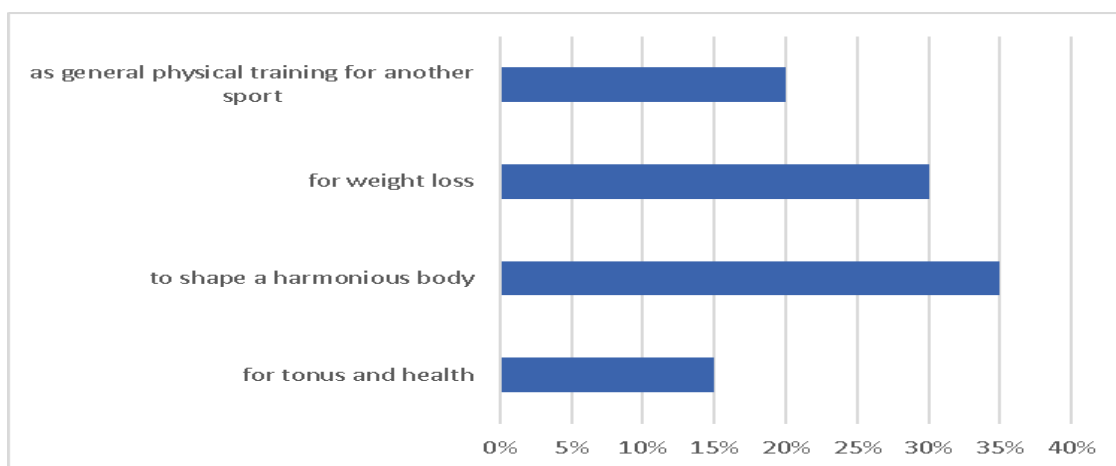


Figure 3. For what purpose do you work out in the gym?

Leading motives among the respondents for visiting gyms are maintaining a harmonious body - 35% and losing weight - 30%. An explanatory and advertising campaign, a targeted marketing strategy towards overweight people would influence in the direction of increasing this percentage. 20% use the gym as a general physical preparation for another sport and only 15% for tone and health.

A different ranking of the leading reasons for engaging in sports or physical activity/exercises from Eurobarometer sociological research in Bulgaria is observed: improving health and relaxing - 33%; weight control – 26%; improving appearance and for fun - 21% and improving sports form - 19% (15).

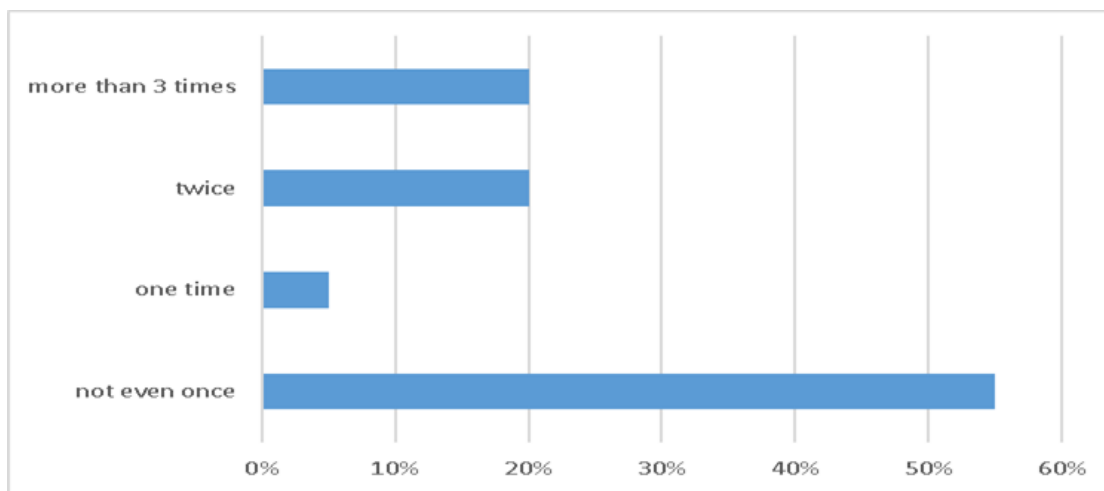


Figure 4. In the last year, have you been on a diet and how many times?

45 percent of the respondents have undergone one, two and more than three times on a diet, which indicates that they are overweight. The answers that "those who underwent diets have a weakly effective result" are ranked first - 57.5%. In second place "no effect" - 25%, and 17.5 percent - "very good result". To be effective, diets must be combined with exercise and sports. A factor that so far does not stand out with a high

percentage in the answers of the surveyed persons. Respondents are aware of the harms of obesity and the diseases that accompany it: hypertension (35%), diabetes (25%) and cardiovascular diseases and heart attacks (40%). 87.5% of them approve of fitness activities as a tool in the fight against excess weight and obesity prevention.

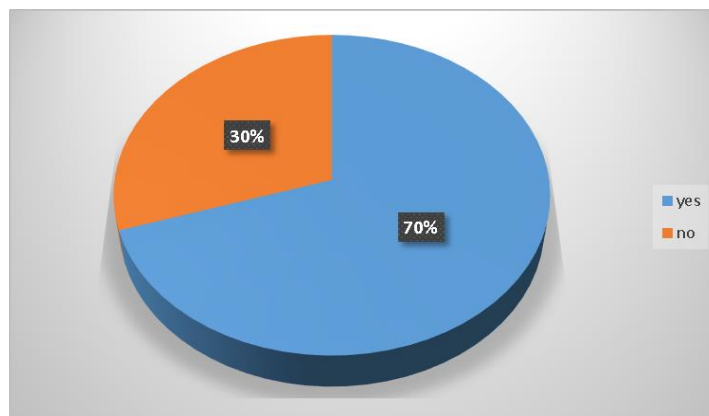


Figure 5. Would you visit gyms more often if they had a special section for overweight people?

Attendance at gyms would increase if there was a special section for overweight people (70%). A local improvement would lead to an improvement throughout the organization. A positive effect of the creation of such a sector would be the opportunity for the target group to make useful social contacts, exchange opinions, motivate each other by the results, etc. Marketing management is the art and science of selecting target markets and finding, retaining, and growing customers by creating, communicating, and delivering better customer value (16).

The analysis shows that 80% of respondents believe that impactful audio and video clips, printed advertising materials, publications and interviews of leading specialists about the harms of immobility would provoke overweight people to more physical activity. In the course of the study, the attitudes of the respondents were investigated regarding the main communication channels that are most trusted by them. Information from this survey would be useful in planning a future fitness campaign to promote the benefits of sport and fitness in the fight against excess weight.

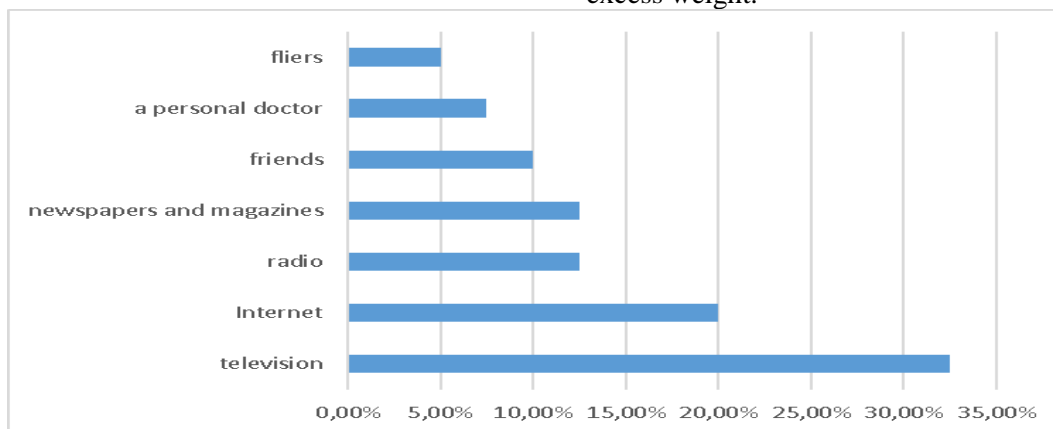


Figure 6. Where do you prefer to find out about the latest in weight loss programs?

Television has the highest percentage of trust regarding receiving information about the latest news in weight reduction programs among those surveyed - 32.5%. The Internet is listed in second place. 20% of respondents prefer to be informed from the global network. Radio, newspapers and magazines are followed by the same percentage of people - 12.5% each. In fourth place, people

indicate friends (10%) as a source of information. 7.5 percent rely on the competence of the GP and only 5 percent would pay attention to an advertising brochure.

55% of respondents realize the importance of physical activity and sports for a healthy lifestyle and believe that the quality of service is closely related to the price they are willing to pay.

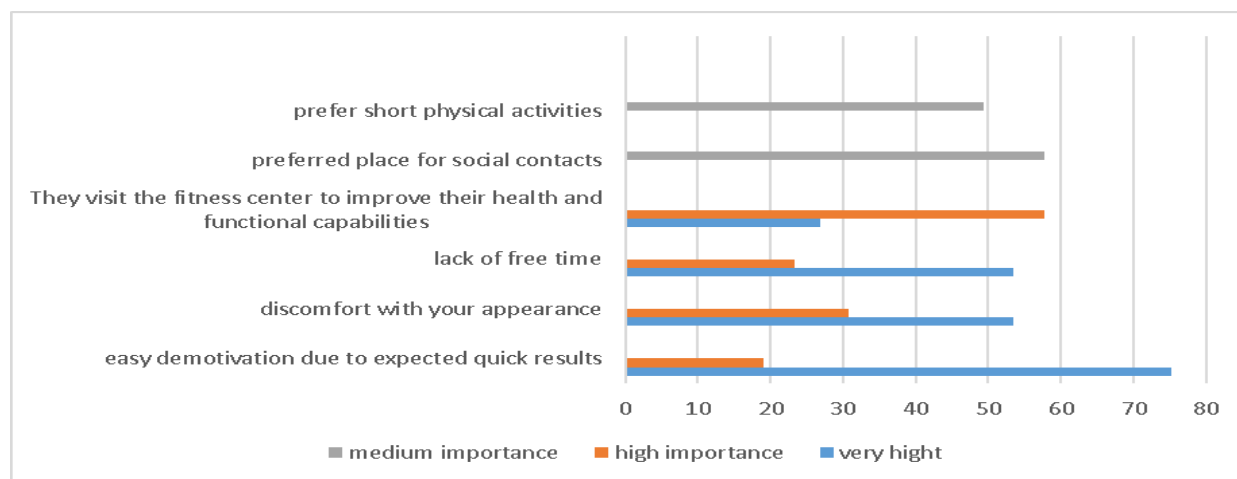


Figure 7. Motives of experts

Of the ten motives included in the expert card, the fitness instructors identified the ones presented in **Figure 7** as particularly significant. The personal psychological support, an explanatory campaign about the benefits of physical activity as a prevention against obesity and its accompanying diseases, as well as the application of special marketing techniques to this target group would help increase attendance at gyms. Targeting the overweight segment as part of your marketing strategy will also help drive traffic and generate profits. A targeted explanatory campaign about the importance of physical activity and sports would be an appropriate way to rearrange priorities, the balanced distribution of free time in order to include physical activities in everyday life.

Gyms are a preferred place for social contacts. They are a place to meet friends, make new acquaintances and make business contacts. This fact is supported by 57.7 percent of instructors. The other motive, which was rated as moderately important, was the preference for short physical activities over strenuous training. Targeted

campaign (through media, state institutions and non-governmental organizations) could change the attitude of people with problematic weight towards physical activity, in particular form a more responsible attitude towards fitness activities, as a prevention against extra pounds. Marketing is increasingly based on information rather than sales (17).

Nearly 1/3 of the fitness professionals rate the motivations for limited physical activity at the expense of diet, demotivation due to monotony in training, and visiting a fitness centre out of vanity as the lowest. This analysis confirms the thesis of purposeful use of fitness services, as well as the responsible and conscious attitude of overweight people to the prescribed regime and program for reducing body mass.

One of the reasons for the lack of interest in the "fitness for overweight" service is that overweight people feel uncomfortable working out with clients with an athletic build. The inclusion of a professional consultation with a nutritionist would increase the quality of the service, and

hence the interest in it, respectively the financial income. Today's socio - economic environment requires the adoption and proposition of new approaches by sports clubs to become aware of all that they represent and do (18).

CONCLUSION

A complex and interdisciplinary approach is needed to solve the specific social problems, a qualitative reassessment of the historically formed ideas about the way of life as a sociological concept and the coordinated efforts of the whole society.

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