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Tourism as a Way to Reduce Stress – Opinions of Professionally Active Persons

Abstract. The intensity of stress in life is treated as the main factor differentiating mental well-being. The aim of the paper is to analyse opinions and behaviours concerning the choice of place and form of holiday trips in the context of stress reduction. The research was conducted in 2016 among 100 working adults. The method applied was the one of a diagnostic survey, with an authorial questionnaire. The results show that the desire of health improvement and a reduction of the negative influence of tension both have a significant influence on the choice of holiday destination. Over half of the respondents experience stress several times a week, or even every day. The main reason for nervous tension, pointed out by both men and women, is their work. The respondents confirmed experiencing numerous somatic symptoms of stress. The majority of the interlocutors perceive positive influence of a vacation on their mental condition. Expanding tourism offers towards improvement of the mental dimension of health may constitute an important element in promotion of pro-health lifestyle.

Keywords: stress, health, mental well-being, health tourism

1. Introduction

Stress is an inherent element of human life in the 21st century. It is caused by various situations and agents, which occur both in professional work, as well as in personal life [Grochmal 1992: 38-64; Trauer 1992: 10; Terelak 2001: 218;

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Terelak 2005: 16; Winstanley 2008: 194-195; Uszyński 2009: 21; Zimbardo, Johnson & McCann 2010: 126-144]. In the contemporary world stress is present at every level of human existence. Quick pace of life, high population density, competition accompanied by long-lasting anxiety, increase likelihood of civilisation diseases [Hartley 2003: 12; Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński 2008: 63; Mackiewicz, Szopa & Ulfik 2014: 183-200]. Naturally, difficult and stressful situations occurred also in the past, but there were fewer agents that triggered them, and the phenomenon itself was not analysed. Scientists have been studying it for a relatively short time, attempting to investigate its causes, effects, which also leads to new concepts of this issue. Besides, it has become more popular to consider stress in the context of various phenomena and factors.

This paper attempts to deal with the notion of vacation trips as a means of coping with stress. It is interesting whether reduction of nervous tension remains an essential motive for tourist trips or whether it influences preferred form of recreation. An ability to deal with stressful situations is crucial in pro-health lifestyle. Therefore, it is important to work out various strategies of stress reduction and eliminating its effects [Potocka 2010: 12; Terelak 2005: 145; Zimbardo, Johnson & McCann 2010: 193-194]. One of methods for stress relief is change of the environment. Even a short trip to a place different than that in which one remains every day (work, home) may efficiently reduce influence of stress factors. Pro-health effects of tourism may be observed in several dimensions:

- social – through change of social environment, establishing new contacts and interpersonal relations;
- mental – isolating from everyday stress, duties at work has a prophylactic function within the area of mental health;
- physical – taking care of physical activity, looks; tourists during trips are more eager to accept any offers of physical activity which significantly improves general condition of an organism [Boruszczak 2009: 45-69].

In connection to the abovementioned, the aim of this paper is to analyse opinions and behaviours concerning choice of place and form of holiday in the context of stress reduction. Carrying out the aim of the research, the following questions were posed: How often the examined people experience stress? What are the sources of stress among the respondents? How do they deal with stressful situations? Does the reduction of stress play a significant role as far as decision about form and way of spending vacation is concerned? Does the decision concerning choice of place for holiday cause nervous tension among the respondents? Do the respondents experience health effects resulting from stress? Can stress occurrence be differentiated with reference to the sex?

2. Material and method

The research was conducted in 2016 (January – March) in Toruń, among 100 adults – 65 women and 35 men, working professionally. The research method used in carrying out the aim was a diagnostic survey, with an authorial questionnaire consisting of 23 questions. The social-environmental characteristics of the respondents is presented in Tables 1-4.

Table 1. Age groups of the respondents

Age	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
18-30	24	36,92	6	17,14	30	30,00
31-40	26	40,00	10	28,57	36	36,00
41-50	10	15,38	14	40,00	24	24,00
51-60	5	7,69	5	14,29	10	10,00
61 and more	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

In the group of women those aged up to 40 years prevailed, while the most numerous group of men are those aged 41-50 years.

Table 2. Educational background of the respondents

Education	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school	0	0,00	2	5,71	2	2,00
Secondary school	5	7,69	3	8,57	8	8,00
Vocational school	9	13,85	3	8,57	12	12,00
High school	15	23,08	17	48,57	32	32,00
B.A.	26	40,00	7	20,00	33	33,00
M.A.	10	15,38	3	8,57	13	13,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

The majority of female answerers are graduates with B.A., while almost half of male answerers are high-school graduates.

Table 3. Place of residence of the respondents

Place of residence	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
City over 200 000 residents	19	29,23	8	22,86	27	27,00
City 50 000-200 000 residents	13	20,00	14	40,00	27	27,00
Town below 50 000 residents	20	30,77	8	22,86	28	28,00
Village	13	20,00	5	14,29	18	18,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Vast majority of answerers are city residents. No differences on the grounds of sex were noted.

Table 4. Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	15	23,08	14	40,00	29	29,00
Partnership	24	36,92	5	14,29	29	29,00
Married	26	40,00	16	45,71	42	42,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

In the examined group prevail married people. Women more often than men declare remaining in an informal relationship.

3. Results

3.1. Occurrence of stress in the examined group

Carrying out the aim of the research, first issues to analyse were those concerning frequency of stress exposure, duration of stressful condition, agents causing stress, somatic symptoms accompanying nervous tension, as well as ways of dealing with stress.

In the light of the above empirical data (Tables 5-6), it turns out that as many as two thirds (66%) of the respondents experience stress every day, while about one fifth (21%) – a few times a week. Such tension has been experienced by the majority of the respondents for a few years, or even for over a decade. The results are similar for both sexes, though women tend to have been dealing with stress for a longer period of time.

Table 5. Frequency of stress exposure

Frequency of experiencing stress	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Every day	43	66,15	23	65,71	66	66,00
A few times a week	14	21,54	7	20,00	21	21,00
A few times a month	6	9,23	2	5,71	8	8,00
Not at all	2	3,08	3	8,57	5	5,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 6. Duration of stressful conditions

Duration of stressful conditions	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Over ten years	30	46,15	12	34,29	42	42,00
Several years	26	40,00	17	48,57	43	43,00
Over a year	4	6,15	2	5,71	6	6,00
A few months	3	4,62	0	0,00	3	3,00
A few weeks	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Shorter than a week	0	0,00	1	2,86	1	1,00
No stressful conditions	2	3,08	3	8,57	5	5,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Career is the most stress-inducing element (Tables 7-8). As many as 51% of the respondents pointed to a very high level of tension (level 5) related to their work duties, with no significant differences with reference to their sex. Financial situation has a negative influence on well-being of 40% of the respondents (20% – very high level of stress, 9% – high level of stress, 11% – average level of stress), but this issue seems to be more important for women than for men (23,08% of women and 14,29% of men pointed to level 5). Another significant agent causing tension is illness, one's own or of somebody in the family, again it was more often pointed out by women.

The most often selected method of dealing with stress was eating sweets (49,23% of women; 68,57% of men) and asking for other people's support (55,38% of women; 45,71% of men). Almost a half of all the answers (44%) referred to a walk (38,46% of women; 54,29% of men). Among the other ways of coping with stress women have chosen: 29,23% – smoking and taking medicines, 23,08% – drinking alcohol, 16,92% – going away, 15,38% – doing sports, 9,23% – hobby, 7,69% – taking illegal substances. Slightly different are men's answers to

Table 7. Agents causing stress and their level at the respondents (work and home conflicts)

Agents causing stress	Work						Home conflicts					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	11	16,92	5	14,29	16	16,00	26	40,00	12	34,29	38	38,00
1	0	0,00	1	2,86	1	1,00	10	15,38	5	14,29	15	15,00
2	4	6,15	3	8,57	7	7,00	4	6,15	9	25,71	13	13,00
3	9	13,85	2	5,71	11	11,00	8	12,31	2	5,71	10	10,00
4	9	13,85	5	14,29	14	14,00	3	4,62	3	8,57	6	6,00
5	32	49,23	19	54,29	51	51,00	14	21,54	4	11,43	18	18,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 8. Agents causing stress and their level at the respondents (financial situation and illness)

Agents causing stress	Financial situation						Illness					
	Women		Men		Total		Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	26	40,00	13	37,14	39	39,00	32	49,23	21	60,00	53	53,00
1	8	12,31	3	8,57	11	11,00	0	0,00	1	2,86	1	1,00
2	6	9,23	4	11,43	10	10,00	4	6,15	3	8,57	7	7,00
3	5	7,69	6	17,14	11	11,00	6	9,23	4	11,43	10	10,00
4	5	7,69	4	11,43	9	9,00	3	4,62	2	5,71	5	5,00
5	15	23,08	5	14,29	20	20,00	20	30,77	4	11,43	24	24,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

this question: 45,71% – smoking, 25,71% – taking medicines, 17,14% – hobby, 11,43% – alcohol, and doing sports, 8,57% – going away, 5,71% – taking illegal substances.

As far as somatic symptoms related with stress are concerned, the respondents could select several answers. The most common symptom is trouble sleeping (49%). Moreover, women have headache (35,38%), fatigue (33,85%), problems with digestive system (26,15%), palpitation and muscle tension (16,92%), dry mouth (12,31%). Men pointed to: fatigue (48,57%), headache (42,86%), muscle tension (22,86%), problems with digestive system (20%), palpitation (17,14%). Lack of any somatic symptoms was the least often selected answer (2,86%).

Table 9. Ways of dealing with stress by the respondents

Reaction to stress	Women (N = 65)		Men (N = 35)		Total (N = 100)	
	N*	%	N*	%	N*	%
Smoking	19	29,23	16	45,71	35	35,00
Drinking alcohol	15	23,08	4	11,43	19	19,00
Eating sweets	32	49,23	24	68,57	56	56,00
Asking others for support	36	55,38	16	45,71	52	52,00
Doing sports	10	15,38	4	11,43	14	14,00
Going for a walk	25	38,46	19	54,29	44	44,00
Doing hobby	6	9,23	6	17,14	12	12,00
Taking medicines	19	29,23	9	25,71	28	28,00
Taking illegal substances	5	7,69	2	5,71	7	7,00
Going away	11	16,92	3	8,57	14	14,00
Other	1	1,54	1	2,86	2	2,00

N* – number of answers given to a multiple choice question

Source: own research.

Table 10. Somatic symptoms of stress in the respondents

Somatic symptoms	Women (N = 65)		Men (N = 35)		Total (N = 100)	
	N*	%	N*	%	N*	%
Palpitation	11	16,92	6	17,14	17	17,00
Dry mouth	8	12,31	1	2,86	9	9,00
Trouble sleeping	35	53,85	14	40,00	49	49,00
Headache	23	35,38	15	42,86	38	38,00
Fatigue	22	33,85	17	48,57	39	39,00
Problems with digestive system	17	26,15	7	20,00	24	24,00
Muscle tension	11	16,92	8	22,86	19	19,00
None	1	1,54	1	2,86	2	2,00
Other	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00

N* – number of answers given to a multiple choice question

Source: own research.

3.2. Holiday trip as a way of dealing with stress by the respondents

The results of research concerning holiday as a way of dealing with stress. What was taken into consideration was choice of place for holiday, way of spending

time, expectations and if stress reduction is a decisive factor in selecting type of holiday (Tables 11-22).

Table 11. Selection of place for holiday as a stress-inducing agent

Selection of place for holiday as a stress-inducing agent	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	11	16,92	8	22,86	19	19,00
Sort of	12	18,46	10	28,57	22	22,00
Not really	27	41,54	13	37,14	40	40,00
Definitely no	15	23,08	4	11,43	19	19,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

For the majority of the respondent selection of place for holiday is not stress-inducing – 40% of all the respondents believe so, including 41,54% of women and 37,14% of men. On the other hand, as many as 28,57% and only 18,46% of women declared that this issue does influence negatively on their well-being. Whereas every fifth man admits to experiencing nervous tension while making decision concerning place of holiday.

Table 12. Motives for going on holiday

Motives for going on holiday	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rest	12	18,46	2	5,71	14	14,00
Change of the environment	18	27,69	10	28,57	28	28,00
Visiting new places	4	6,15	3	8,57	7	7,00
Health improvement	8	12,31	7	20,00	15	15,00
An opportunity to de-stress	22	33,85	13	37,14	35	35,00
Other	1	1,54	0	0,00	1	1,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

The most common reason for holiday is willingness to relax (33,85% women, 37,14% men). Lesser significance had willingness to change environment (27,69% women, 28,57% men). Moreover, women go on holiday to rest (18,46%), while men – for health purposes, as 20% of them declared.

Nearly half of the respondents (46%) confirmed that willingness to eliminate nervous tension is an essential factor influencing choice of place for holiday trip (44,62 per of women, 48,57% of men), while 39% stated that such dependency does occur.

Table 13. Reduction of symptoms/effects of stress vs. choice of place for holiday

Willingness to reduce stress through choice of place for holiday	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely yes	29	44,62	17	48,57	46	46,00
Sort of	26	40,00	13	37,14	39	39,00
Not really	8	12,31	4	11,43	12	12,00
Definitely no	2	3,08	1	2,86	3	3,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 14. Season for holiday trip

Season for holiday trip	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spring	11	16,92	5	14,29	16	16,00
Summer	37	56,92	17	48,57	54	54,00
Autumn	6	9,23	3	8,57	9	9,00
Winter	11	16,92	10	28,57	21	21,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Over a half of the respondents (54%) go on holiday in summer, men choose also winter, more often that women do.

Table 15. Place for holiday

Place for holiday	Women (N = 65)		Men (N = 35)		Total (N = 100)	
	N*	%	N*	%	N*	%
I do not go on holiday	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Seaside	44	67,69	12	34,29	56	56,00
Mountains	22	33,85	21	60,00	43	43,00
Mazury Lakes	13	20,00	9	25,71	22	22,00
Lake	16	24,62	12	34,29	28	28,00
Agritourism	10	15,38	10	28,57	20	20,00
Other	8	12,31	3	8,57	11	11,00

N* – number of answers given to a multiple choice question.

Source: own research.

Results of research show that women choose seaside more eagerly (67,69%), while men prefer going to the mountains (60%).

Table 16. Types of tourism preferred by the respondents

Preferred types of tourism	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spa & Wellness	13	20,00	5	14,29	18	18,00
Adventure tourism	9	13,85	5	14,29	14	14,00
Spa & Wellness combined with adventure tourism	20	30,77	17	48,57	37	37,00
I plan holiday myself	23	35,38	8	22,86	31	31,00
Other	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

It turns out that men prefer combination of Spa&Wellness with adventure tourism (48,57%), while women prefer organising plan of holiday on their own (35,38%).

Table 17. Way spending holiday by the respondents

Way of spending holiday	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Travelling	5	7,69	5	14,29	10	10,00
In a hotel	8	12,31	3	8,57	11	11,00
Mixed	32	49,23	18	51,43	50	50,00
On my own	18	27,69	7	20,00	25	25,00
Survival	1	1,54	1	2,86	2	2,00
Other	1	1,54	1	2,86	2	2,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Half of the respondents decided on a mixed type of holiday – among both women (49,23%) and men (51,43%) it was the answer most often selected.

Table 18. Stress reduction in the respondents after the recent holiday

Stress reduction after the recent holiday	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
No	1	1,54	0	0,00	1	1,00
A little bit	6	9,23	3	8,57	9	9,00
To some degree	14	21,54	5	14,29	19	19,00
Yes	25	38,46	11	31,43	36	36,00
Very much	19	29,23	16	45,71	35	35,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

What is important is that stress reduction after the recent holiday is declared by 29,23% of women and almost a half of men (45,71%). Nearly 10% of the respondents felt reduction of stress effects after holiday only slightly.

For the biggest group of respondents an ideal stress-reducing holiday is a one week trip with family, spent actively near water or abroad (Tables 19-22).

Table 19. Fellow travellers preferred by the respondents

Ideal holiday – fellow travellers	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Alone	13	20,00	10	28,57	23	23,00
Family	38	58,46	23	65,71	61	61,00
Friends	11	16,92	2	5,71	13	13,00
Other	3	4,62	0	0,00	3	3,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 20. Preferred duration of holiday

Ideal holiday – duration	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
A few days	11	16,92	4	11,34	15	15,00
A week	31	47,69	17	48,57	48	48,00
Two weeks	23	35,38	14	40,00	37	37,00
Other	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 21. Preferred place for holiday

Ideal holiday – place	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Water	22	33,85	10	28,57	32	32,00
Mountains	12	18,46	8	22,86	20	20,00
Abroad	21	32,31	12	34,29	33	33,00
Agritourism	9	13,85	5	14,29	14	14,00
Other	1	1,54	0	0,00	1	1,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

Table 22. Preferred type of holiday

Ideal holiday – type	Women		Men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spa	22	33,85	12	34,29	34	34,00
Active recreation	29	44,62	17	48,57	46	46,00
Educational trip	10	15,38	6	17,14	16	16,00
Other	4	6,15	0	0,00	4	4,00
Total	65	100,00	35	100,00	100	100,00

Source: own research.

4. Conclusion

In our times, there has been a growing interest in tourism, which is treated as an important element of healthy lifestyle. Such a way of spending leisure time helps to rest, regenerate physically and mentally, reduce stress, but also implement modification in a diet and learn new forms of physical activity. A crucial element in tourism development is changing profile of diseases [NPZ na lata 2007-2015; Wojtyniak, Goryński & Moskalewicz 2012: 34-52]. It should be underlined that this refers mainly to civilization diseases, involving the locomotor system, the circulatory system or the nervous system. These ailments may be constrained by active participation in health tourism. In Poland, as well as abroad, typical health resort treatment is being abandoned in favour of spa and wellness treatment. Modern health strengthening centres are built in Europe. In America and Asia there is a tendency to transform big medical centres into prophylaxis facilities. These facilities are to serve health purposes, but also offer psycho-physical recreation, including yoga. Goodrich [1993: 36-41] in his concept of health tourism suggests including yoga and relaxation exercises into basic medical services.

The aim of presented research was to analyse opinions and behaviours concerning choice of place and type of holiday trip in the context of stress reduction. The results obtained show that willingness to improve health, limit negative effects of nervous tension such as: headaches, fatigue, trouble sleeping, have influence on selected place of holiday. Over a half of the respondents experience stress a few times a week, or even every day. As the main stress-inducing agent both women and men point to work. It turns out that also the process of choosing place for holiday may be a stress-inducing agent, particularly for men. The respondents confirmed experiencing many somatic symptoms of stress. It is optimistic, however, that as many as 71% of the respondents experience positive influence of holiday on their mental condition. In their opinion, holiday is a means for

de-stressing, releasing tension, distancing from everyday problems. Such is also the criterion while selecting place for holiday. It should be underlined that going on holiday may in itself be the reason for improvement of well-being and mental comfort, on the other hand, it may contribute to increasing physical activity by undertaking various form of adventure tourism, which, in turn, may positively influence a human being and reduce stress. Stress cannot be eliminated completely, that is why it is so important to take actions to limit its effects. Even a short trip, taking a few days or a week, when properly organised – according to one's expectations and preferences – may give numerous health benefits, regeneration of vital and mental strength.

This research may become an introduction to a broader issue – thorough analysis of holiday preferences concerning place, form, time and duration in bigger and more diversified group of respondents. This may contribute to expanding tourist and recreational offers directed towards improvement of mental health. Holiday is to be a way of returning balance to an organism, preferably through active recreation, since it favourably influences one's condition and health. It is optimistic that so many respondents pointed to adventure tourism and active recreation as ways of spending holiday and reducing stress.

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Turystyka jako sposób na obniżenie poziomu stresu w opinii osób aktywnych zawodowo

Streszczenie. Natężenie stresu życiowego uważane jest za główny czynnik różnicujący dobrostan psychiczny. Celem pracy jest analiza poglądów i zachowań dotyczących wyboru miejsca i formy wyjazdu urlopowego w kontekście redukcji stresu. Badania przeprowadzono w 2016 r. wśród 100 dorosłych osób, pracujących zawodowo. Zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego, technikę ankiety z wykorzystaniem autorskiego kwestionariusza. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że chęć poprawy zdrowia i ograniczenie negatywnych skutków napięcia nerwowego mają istotny wpływ na wybór miejsca urlopu. Ponad połowa badanych osób przeżywa stres kilka razy w tygodniu lub codziennie. Jako główny czynnik powodujący napięcie nerwowe zarówno kobiety, jak i mężczyźni wskazują pracę zawodową. Respondenci potwierdzili odczuwanie wielu somatycznych objawów stresu. Większość z nich dostrzegło pozytywny wpływ urlopu na kondycję psychiczną. Rozszerzenie ofert turystyczno-rekreacyjnych ukierunkowanych na poprawę psychicznego wymiaru zdrowia może stanowić ważny element promocji prozdrowotnego stylu życia.

Słowa kluczowe: stres, zdrowie, dobrostan psychiczny, turystyka zdrowotna