

## **Leisure/Physical Activity and the Older Adult in Saskatchewan**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the number of publications and level of interest concerning the elderly have increased exponentially. As life expectancies in the developed world continue to rise, it is not surprising that so much attention is being given to the aging process, and to the aged populations in general. Those over 65 constitute a growing percentage of the industrialized world's total population, and Canada is no exception to this trend. Canada has been considered by demographers to be an "aged society" since 1971, when 8% of its population were older than 65 (Searle, 1987:1). According to the 1986 census, 10.7% of Canada's total population is over the age of 65. Projections for the future indicate that Canada's total percentage of older adults will continue to rise for the next 40 years (Statistics Canada, 1985). Provincially, in 1986, both Saskatchewan and P.E.I. had 12.7% of their total population over the age of 65 - the highest in per capita terms among the Canadian provinces (Canada Census, 1986).

Research conducted to date suggests that a considerable amount of knowledge has been gained about those 65 and over. It is clear that there are conflicts in the reports, the theories, and the beliefs presented by various professionals. Most importantly, to this study, much of this previous data was not necessarily transferable to the Saskatchewan setting and without data specific to Saskatchewan it was not possible to ascertain what knowledge could be transferred.

Despite the fact that Saskatchewan has a high relative population of older adults, very little is known about where these seniors live and how they spend their time. No data base exists relative to the Saskatchewan older adult and their involvement in leisure/physical activity, especially as this behaviour relates to the quality of their life. As a result of this lack of information, the purpose of this study was to establish a data pool on Saskatchewan older adults with a particular emphasis on leisure. An ultimate objective of the study was to increase and update the information available to those who influence the health and happiness of Saskatchewan's older adult population.

The information generated in this descriptive study will provide the baseline information essential to strategic planning in the delivery system as well as generate a pool of data for further research analysis. Further study will include comparative analysis with other areas of Canada as well as specific investigations of regional interest.

### **METHOD**

Initially, to develop a spatial understanding of the distribution of people aged 65 and over in the Province of Saskatchewan, the population statistics obtained from the Provincial Health Registry were mapped using relative and absolute data. The relative data were mapped using a double ended choropleth map. This technique graphically depicted significant regional variations in the relative population of residents aged 65 and over. The absolute data were mapped using a dot map. This technique graphically depicted concentrations of older adults in specific locations in the Province. Using this spatial analysis

as a point of reference, a stratified random sample of 4,800 older adults was selected from the Provincial Health Registry. The sample was stratified by zone (eight zones in the Province) and by location within a type of settlement (i.e. city, town, village, or rural municipality). The Provincial Health Registry provided a very up to date population base from which to select the sample boasting a less than five percent margin of error in registrations for the total Provinces population base.

An eight page questionnaire was developed and pilot tested using the framework of Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method. The questionnaire was sent to the 4,800 older adults included in the sample. A reminder card and a final follow-up letter were used to increase the return from the members of the sample.

The data were analyzed using SPSS-X. As a part of the analysis of the data collected, the ARC/INFO Geographical Information System (GIS) at the University of Regina is being used to integrate the spatial data provided through the development of the stratified sample selection with the useable data collected from the returned questionnaires.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Of the 4,800 questionnaires mailed out, a return rate in excess of 64% was achieved. This response was very good given the length of the questionnaire and size of the sample spread over a large geographic area.

The study results will be discussed in terms of theory, practical implications, and future research needs relative to older adult populations in the prairie region of Canada and specifically Saskatchewan.

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**PROCEEDINGS**  
**Sixth Canadian Congress on Leisure Research**  
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**Editor/Le rédacteur: Bryan J. A. Smale**

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