

Residential mobility as a strategy of quality of life in old people

SHORT ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: To improve the Quality of Life (QoL) of old people has become a challenge for the managers of the services and public equipments and an academic subject of great interest for researchers. Moreover, the people live nowadays more years, in better economic and material conditions, which helps to understand the increasing residential mobility of this group of population. But few studies have investigated how the mobility and/or the migration (temporal or definitive) contributes to improve the different aspects from the life of the aged population from the global approach of the QoL.

OBJECTIVE: The aim of this contribution is to know the influence of the residential mobility of the retired people on the different elements/dimensions of their life. It will be analyzed how their life conditions and the surroundings have been modified, the changes in the satisfaction with the dimensions of their QoL, in order to understand the meaning of the residential transfer in the QoL of this population.

METHOD: The used methodology is qualitative and the results are obtained from the accomplishment of in depth-interviews with people with 60 and more years who have developed mobility from the city of Madrid towards other places in Spain. The analysis of the information will be made with the Atlas-ti programme.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS: Factors pushing the residential mobility in these population are analyzed, depending on their sociodemographic characteristics, the family, the social contacts, the environmental conditions of the place of destination, and the distance between Madrid and the destination place. It is also important to know the consequences of the moves related to the QoL of this aged population, to see how the change of residence has affected the main dimensions of their QoL, their global satisfaction and their well-being.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Europe, in comparison with other zones of the world, is attending a fast aging of its population, and this situation will be increasing in the future (ONU, 2001). The present longevity of the population implies that people reach the age of retirement having a high number of years still to live; moreover, improvements in the health and in Quality of Life (QoL), the increasing economic availability of older people, the new forms of familiar relations, and the intergenerational changes, lead to new opportunities for this group which imply the transformation of many traditional behavior patterns (Cribier and Kych, 1993). The aged people live more and more years and are in better economic and material conditions, which allows them to travel and to change the places where to live (Warnes, 2004). Thus, several factors can explain the increasing mobility of this group, both at national and at international scale.

Recently, much attention has been dedicated to the study of the QoL, but few investigations have focused on the QoL of the aged people; consequently, the knowledge of the variables and elements that influence the QoL of the group of population is still very limited (Borglin *et al.*, 2005). Nevertheless, the improvement of the life conditions of the older has become a challenge for the managers of services and public equipments and an academic subject of great interest for researchers. One of the objectives of the developed and aged societies is to optimize the QoL of the older (Borglin *et al.*, 2005) and for this, the governmental planners and people in charge need new conceptualizations and methodologic tools. On one hand, researchers dedicated to the QoL in old people try to establish the influential elements in this concept and its hierarchic importance (Bowling and Windsor, 2001), on the other hand, the studies devoted to the mobility of the aged population have been interested in geographic-territorial aspects and socioeconomic impacts (Rodríguez *et al.*, 1998). Both phenomena have been separately studied, but rarely their interactions have been examined.

The physical and residential surroundings are important elements for the QoL among the older (Rojo, *et al.*, 2001; Rojo *et al.*, 2002), although the QoL have not been studied related to the process of a residential movement, taking into account the mobility as a strategy to improve the global well-being of this population.

Objective and Method

With this contribution, we try to relate the aging of the population, the QoL -satisfaction in the life of the oldest- and the residential mobility -in form of migration or not strictly -, to determine how mobility influences the QoL of this people and in order to see what elements of the QoL are in the base of mobility in these ages.

Factors pushing the residential change and factors on which depend the different mobility patterns will be analyzed. It is also interesting to know how the new residential surroundings is affecting the life conditions of the aged, and the changes produced in the different scopes/dimensions of the life satisfaction; finally we try to understand the meaning of the residential movement in the QoL of this population group.

The interest is not only to know the mobility aspects and its consequences in relation to the QoL, but also the future expectations of these displacements and the expected consequences that the mobility would have in people who now are thinking in changing their place of residence.

The used methodology is qualitative, and the results are obtained from the realization of in depth-interviews (in places of destination and origin) with people aged 60 years and more, who have developed mobility after their retirement or before; the sample comes from people living in Madrid who have moved to other places in Spain (to metropolitan areas, rural and coastal zones, or going back to birth places). The analysis of the information will be made with the Atlas-ti programme.

Quality of life and residential mobility in old people

The life conditions and the QoL in old people are subjects attracting the interest of the public policies and the society in general (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2003). The improvement of these aspects would increase the independence of this group of population, their contribution to the society, their physical, social and mental health, and it would help to respond with effectiveness to their physical, psychological and social changes (O'Boyle, 1997); by this way, it would be possible to add quality to the years of life. This approach supposes a change with respect to the negative paradigm extended in social and clinic sciences during the past, when oldness was associated to declivity, the deficiency of health, by the poverty and the lack of functionality.

In spite of abundance of studies on QoL, there is not still consensus neither on his definition, neither on his dimensions (and the factors that influence the QoL), neither on its measurement (Fry, 2000). Many authors emphasize the restrictive and traditional vision on the elements that influence the QoL among the elderly. In particular, the main objection is related to the enormous importance that health determinants have traditionally had (Smedley and Syme, 2000), but in particular, the excessive importance that individual characteristics of the people to explain their QoL has been criticized (Raphael *et al.*, 1999); opposed to these factors, other ones are important like the achievement of personal control and new opportunities, which are considered as basic factors to have a good health according to the World Health Organization (OMS, 2002).

Nevertheless, we do not know well how is the contribution of many other factors to the well-being of the aged population, and particularly the effect of the environmental, cultural and social aspects on their QoL. For example, environmental models are slightly developed, and little is known about the influence of the residential conditions to promote the independence and the social participation of the aged (Fernández-Mayoralas *et al.*, 2004; Schaie *et al.*, 2003; Rojo *et al.*, 2001; Rojo *et al.*, 2002). There are authors who have demonstrated that the characteristics and quality of the neighbourhood influence in the emotional well-being of this population (Lawton, 1983), in their mortality (Roux *et al.*, 2004) and they have studied the effect that the social activity has in the mortality reduction (Kawachi *et al.*, 1997). These results seem to be very related to other researchs, that show that health, independence, family relations, social contacts, material conditions, mobility, capacity to make activities and house conditions are the most important dominions of the QoL (Farquhar, 1995).

The analysis of the QoL in an specific residential surroundings connects directly with residential mobility, since the residential mobility change the physical scenery and contribute to vary the elements/factors that affect the QoL. Therefore, mobility can expose the person to a new residential surroundings affecting its health, the relations with friends and relatives, and the global well-being. The environmental characteristics have a variable effect in the experiences of these people, because the different types of residence influence the levels of activity and the state of health (Cummins *et al.*, 2005); on the same way, other studies have evaluated the effect of environmental characteristics on the life of the elderly focusing on the achievement of daily activities

(Rojo *et al.*, 2002). But apart from the analysis of the QoL, very few studies have considered the residential change (or the migration) as a strategy to improve the QoL.

On the other hand, the migration of old people is rapidly increasing and this subject is becoming an important demographic, economic and social phenomenon in Europe (Duncombe *et al.*, 2003). The volume of migrant retired population in the last years is growing and the tendency is that this phenomenon will continue in the future as the population ages and the generation of the baby-boom will reach the 65 years.

Many aged people, once broken the territorial bonds based on the labor biography, look for greater stillness, more attractive environmental or climatic scenarios, and for leisure activities and services (Stimson and Minnery, 1998; Williams *et al.*, 2000). These elements are reached by residential strategies developed by relatively young retired people (young oldest), still having good health and after the emancipation of their children. These residential movements are detonated by events at the same biographical moments, but always adopted with similar intention: calm and still, well-being, more attractive surroundings, and social incentives; they are elements that improve the general well-being, that makes them feel better and that increase the QoL (Warnes, 2004).

Persecuting these objectives, strategies for retirement not always are decided by returning to a place of previous residence, because not always there is it; on the contrary, the older people use to move to the place where they have a second residence or to other known place where they used to be on holidays, and where they have a established network of relations, leisure services and entertainment (Müller, 2002).

Previous studies that analyzed the mobility of this group of population (Abellán and Rojo, 1998; Puga, 2004) reveals that most of these displacements take place towards smaller municipalities than those of origin, on the coast or in areas of second residences, but with the possibility of offering well-being and with quality of the surroundings. The adopted residential strategies usually are varied, but moving from a great city like Madrid to the countryside or to a coastal area, for example, can be the key for a more satisfactory life; for others, the movement can be the change of a great house in the city by other less expensive to maintain.

Independently of how the displacements are classified, all of them are undertaken as a strategy for the improvement of the QoL of the person, with the intention of improving some vital aspect. Nevertheless, this mobility has not analyzed as a strategy of QoL. Diverse studies made on international retired migrants moving to Mediterranean coastal areas have analyzed the motivations of that mobility (Rodríguez *et al.*, 1998; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2005), but no works at the moment have put in relation the mobility-migration (national or international) with the QoL.

Results and Conclusions

We try to emphasize the importance that environmental factors have in the QoL in aging people who have transferred their residence from Madrid to other places in Spain. It will be see that to take the decision to move is complicated -mainly when the movement is definitive- and it is influenced by the sociodemographic characteristics of the people (mainly the genre, the age and the civil state), by the social and also the environmental factors (living in a great city with noise, pollution, etc.), by the family (existence of children or not), by the health; apart from those, other important factors as having or not a second residence, and the car distance between Madrid and the

future place for retirement, are important elements that can determine a definitive or temporary residential transfer.

After some time in the new destinations, the benefits of the movement are remarkable mainly in health and in social relations. The residential transfer affects clearly to several elements and dimensions that determine the QoL of these people, and it will be seen how the evaluation that these people do about how these elements have changed is generally very positive after the residential change.

Key Words: residential mobility; old people; quality of life; Madrid.

Bibliography

- Abellán, A. and Rojo, F. (1998): "La movilidad residencial de las personas de edad", en J. Ganau Casas and J. Vilagrasa Ibarz (Eds.): *La ciutat fragmentada: grups socials, qualitat de vida i participació*, Lleida, Universitat de Lleida, pp. 55-74.
- Borglin, G.; Edberg, A.-K. and Rahm, I. (2005): "The experience of quality of life among older people", *Journal of Aging Studies*, vol. 19, n. 2, pp. 201-220.
- Bowling, A. and Windsor, J. (2001): "Towards the good life: a population survey on dimensions of quality of life", *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 2, n. 1, pp. 55-81.
- Cribier, F. and Kych, A. (1993): "A comparison of retirement migration from Paris and London", *Environment and Planning A*, 25, vol. 10, pp. 1.399-1.420.
- Cummins, S.; Stafford, M.; Macintyre, S.; Marmot, M. and Ellaway, A. (2005): "Neighbourhood environment and its association with self rated health: evidence from Scotland and England", *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, vol. 59, n. 3, pp. 207-213.
- Duncombe, W.; Robbins, M. and Wolf, D.A. (2003): "Place Characteristics and Residential location choice among the retirement-age population", *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences B.*, vol. 58B, n. 4, pp. S244-S252.
- Farquhar, M. (1995): "Elderly people's definitions of quality of life", *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 41, n. 10, pp. 1.439-1.446.
- Fernández-Ballesteros, R. (2003): "Light and dark in the psychology of human strengths: the example of psychogerontology", en L.G. Aspinwall and U.M. Saludinger (Eds.): *A psychology of human strengths*, Washington DC, Ed. American Psychological Association.
- Fernández-Mayoralas, G.; Rojo, F. and Rojo, J.M. (2004): "Components of the Residential Environment and Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Elderly", *Journal of Housing for the Elderly*, vol. 18, n. 1, pp. 25-49.
- Fry, P. (2000): "Whose quality of life is it anyway? Why not ask seniors to tell us about it?", *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, vol. 50, n. 4, pp. 361-383.
- Kawachi, I.; Kennedy, B.P.; Lochner, K. and Prothrow-Stith, D. (1997): "Social capital, income inequality and mortality", *American Journal of Public Health*, n. 87, pp. 1.491-1.498.
- Lawton, M.P. (1983): "Environment and other determinants of well-being in older people", *Gerontologist*, vol. 23, n. 4, pp. 349-357.
- Müller, D. (2002): "German Second homeowners in Sweden: some remarks on the tourism-migration nexus", *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, vol. 18, n. 1, pp. 67-86.
- O'Boyle, C.A. (1997): "Measuring the quality of life of later life", *Philosophy Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, n. 352, pp. 1.871-1.879.
- OMS (2002): *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*, WHO (Organización Mundial de la Salud), Geneva.

- ONU (2001): *World population ageing: 1950-2050*, New York, Organización Naciones Unidas.
- Puga, M^a D. (2004): *Estrategias residenciales de las personas de edad. Movilidad y curso de vida*, Barcelona, Fundación "la Caixa".
- Raphael, D.; Steinmetz, B. and Renwick, R. (1999): *The People, Places and Priorities of Lawrence Heights: Conclusions from the Community Quality of Life Project*, Canada, University of Toronto [<http://www.utoronto.ca/qol/comReports.htm>], 17 pp.
- Rodríguez, V.; Casado-Díaz, M.A. and Huber, A. (Eds.) (2005): *La migración de europeos retirados en España*, Madrid, Col. Politeya, Estudios de Política y Sociedad, CSIC.
- Rodríguez, V.; Fernández-Mayoralas, G. and Rojo, F. (1998): "European Retirees on the Costa del Sol: A Cross-National Comparison", *International Journal of Population Geography*, vol. 4, n. 2, pp. 183-200.
- Rojo, F.; Fernández-Mayoralas, G.; Pozo, E. and Rojo, J. M. (2001): "Ageing in Place: Predictors of the Residential Satisfaction of Elderly", *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 54, n. 2, pp. 173-208.
- Rojo, F.; Fernández-Mayoralas, G. Pozo, E. and Rojo, J.M. (Eds.) (2002): *Envejecer en casa la satisfacción residencial de los mayores en Madrid como indicador de su calidad de vida*, Madrid, Monografías, n. 23, CSIC.
- Roux, A. V.; Norrel, L. N.; Haan, M.; Jackon, S. A. and Schulz, R. (2004): "Neighbourhood environments and mortality in an elderly cohort: results from the cardiovascular health study", *Journal Epidemiol. Community Health*, vol. 58, n. 11, pp. 917-923.
- Schaie, K.W.; Wahl, H.W.; Mollenkopf, H. and Oswald, F. (Eds.) (2003): *Aging independently. Living arguments and mobility*, New York, Springer Publishing Co.
- Smedley, B.D. and Syme, L.S. (2000): *Promoting health: Intervention strategies from social and behavioral research*, Washington DC, National Academy Press.
- Stimson, R.J. and Minnery, J. (1998): "Why People Move to the 'Sun-belt': A Case Study of Long-distance Migration to the Gold Coast, Australia", *Urban Studies*, vol. 35, n. 2, pp. 193-214.
- Warnes, A.M. (2004): "Incremento y diversidad de las personas mayores emigrantes en Europa", *Revista Española de Geriatría y Gerontología*, vol. 39, n. 4, pp. 260-269.
- Williams, A.M.; King, R.L.; Warnes, A.M. and Patterson, G. (2000): "Tourism and international retirement migration: new forms of and old relationship in southern Europe", *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 2, n. 1, pp. 28-49.