

Daily Activity and Life Satisfaction in Older People Living in Rural Contexts

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This study is aimed at exploring daily and desired activity patterns in a sample of older people living in a rural context, as well as at examining the effect of some influential factors and their relationships with life satisfaction. Our sample was made of 216 retired people and was recruited from 12 villages from Catalonia and Valencia with populations of less than 1000 inhabitants. Data were gathered by means of an interview that included daily and ideal activities and life satisfaction (by applying the Life Satisfaction Index). Our results show that yesterday's pattern of activities is similar to an ideal pattern, although in the ideal day, our sample allocated more time to social activities and less time to passive activities such as watching TV or resting. In both cases, leisure activities and time spent working seem to play an important role in older people's life. Gender has a remarkable influence on patterns of activity, as women devoted more time to instrumental activities and less time to leisure. In general, differences between yesterday's and ideal activities were not related to life satisfaction.

Keywords: aging, life satisfaction, gender, rural context

El presente estudio explora el patrón de actividades cotidianas y deseadas en una muestra de personas mayores que viven en un entorno rural, el efecto de algunos factores y sus implicaciones para la satisfacción con la vida. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 216 personas jubiladas, y fue recogida en 12 pueblos de menos de 1000 habitantes de la Comunidad Valenciana y Cataluña. Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas, tanto las actividades como la satisfacción con la vida (mediante el Índice de Satisfacción Vital). Los resultados muestran que el patrón de actividades realizadas en el día de ayer es similar al que se realizaría en un día ideal, aunque en éste se desearía pasar más tiempo en compañía y disminuir el tiempo en actividades pasivas. El ocio desempeña en ambos patrones (ayer e ideal) un importante papel en la vida de las personas analizadas, así como el tiempo dedicado al trabajo. El género es un condicionante de la actividad cotidiana, ya que las mujeres dedican significativamente más tiempo a actividades instrumentales, tiempo que restan a las actividades de ocio. En general, la diferencia entre el día de ayer y el día ideal no se relacionó con la satisfacción con la vida.

Palabras clave: envejecimiento, satisfacción vital, género, entornos rurales

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Aging of the population is one of the most stable demographic tendencies that developed societies have undergone in the last few decades, a tendency that also particularly affects rural environments. For example, in Spanish towns of less than 500 inhabitants, the elderly population may comprise 40% of the total population, whereas in the general population, it does not exceed 20% (IMSERSO, 2006). Rural ageing, besides involving different assistential challenges from those of urban contexts (Beverly et al., 2007), presents some special characteristics than may be reflected in the type of daily activities. Thus, upon comparing both contexts, Pérez Ortiz (2006) noted that contact with other people from the same setting is more spontaneous and less formal in rural contexts. There are more friendships, and activities are more continuous over time. Moreover, it is easier to adapt to retirement because often work in the country does not decrease substantially. Despite these peculiarities, there are very few works that have studied ageing in this kind of environment from the viewpoint of daily activity.

The activity patterns of old people have been the object of study by Gerontology specialists. In many cases, this interest has been associated with a clinical perspective, emphasizing the activities required to lead an autonomous life, for example, the daily basic activities, focused on self-care (eating, washing, or dressing) and the daily instrumental activities (cooking, cleaning, or managing money, among others) (Fernández Ballesteros, Izal, Montorio, Díaz-Veiga, & González, 1992). Clinical interest has sometimes also included the elderly population from rural contexts, such as, for example, the study of Oswald, Wahl, Mollenkopf, and Schilling (2003) on autonomy in instrumental activities of elderly people living in towns.

However, interest in daily activity can go beyond its relation with autonomy and propose it as a component of satisfactory ageing. According to Rowe and Kahn (1997, 1999), in addition to good health and functional autonomy, a person should engage actively in life in order to age successfully. Such engagement is reflected in productive activities (either paid or unpaid) and satisfactory social activity. Thus, performing certain activities every day may be one of the keys to satisfactory ageing (Freund & Baltes, 1998; Menec, 2003).

In this sense, the relevance of leisure is noted in the fact that some activities are just as important to satisfactory ageing as the basic or instrumental activities that one “must” carry out (McKenna, Broome, & Liddle, 2007; Silverstein & Parker, 2002). However, leisure time could be used to perform very diverse activities. For example, Lawton (1993) differentiates three types of leisure activities:

1. *Experiential activities*, carried out alone with no other aim but to enjoy the activity itself.
2. *Self-development activities*, also carried out alone, but to achieve an extrinsic goal that is valued by the person and that somehow will bring about a change in the person.

3. *Social activities* that people engage in due to their capacity to reinforce, establish or maintain social links and positive contacts with third persons.

The two latter types of activities are particularly relevant for successful ageing, as they correspond approximately to the activities that Rowe and Kahn (1997, 1999) underscore as components of satisfactory ageing.

In contrast, as daily activity is subject to certain obligations, influences, and personal resources that are, by definition, limited, we can also distinguish between activities actually carried out and activities one would *like* to carry out if it were not for these restrictions. This concept of “ideal activities” is similar to that of possible *selves* (Hooker, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986) or to that of desired and undesired selves (Brandtstädter, 1999). Likewise, ideal activities can act as a motivating element that guides one’s choices and as a comparison term to appraise one’s present activity. An excessive distance from one’s goals (that is, when one’s daily activity is not similar to what one would really like to do) can originate undertaking actions aimed at reducing this distance. If excessive distance is maintained, it could have negative effects on personal satisfaction, which partly depends on the balance between what one has or one’s self-perception in the present and what one would like to have and how one would like to perceive oneself (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002).

Focusing on old age, although ageing can lead to more obstacles to perform certain types of activities, for example, because of the higher likelihood of health problems or of having lost one’s partner, it is also very likely that other obstacles will disappear. Thus, as elder people’s leisure time increases, there are more opportunities to decrease the distance between what they actually do and what they would really like to do. Moreover, as people get older, their reduced temporal perspective makes them less likely to imagine important future changes in their activities. This could lead to proposing more modest and short-term desired activities, which would be more closely related to what they already do in the present (Brandtstädter, 1999; Ryff, 1991). If personal satisfaction depends partially on the distance between the present situation and the desired one, its reduction in old age could lead to high levels of general satisfaction. Therefore, one could also expect even higher levels of satisfaction in older people whose daily activities correspond to a greater degree to the activities they would really like to perform.

To sum up, our study has three main purposes. Firstly, we shall examine the pattern of daily activities of a sample of older autonomous people who live in a rural context and the extent to which this pattern coincides with the activities they would like to perform. Secondly, we wish to determine which sociodemographic variables (such as the older person’s age or gender) and social network variables (contact frequency with friends and relatives) may influence the configuration of the daily activity patterns. Lastly, we shall

examine the impact that the daily activity pattern and the distance between such activities and those the person would like to perform has on older people's personal satisfaction.

Method

Participants

In this study, there were 216 retired people, aged 65 years or more. Mean age was 73.6 years ($SD = 6.12$). The sample was made up of 97 males (44.7%) and 119 females (55.3%).

The sample was recruited from seven towns of inner Catalonia and five towns from the Community of Valencia. All the towns visited had less than 1,000 inhabitants and their lifestyle was based on agriculture. The sample was recruited intentionally, taking into account that approximately the same number of men and women, from two different age ranges (65 to 75 and over 75), should be recruited in each town.

Of the total sample, 67.0% were married and 27.0% were widowed. However, the sample had more married men (74) than married women (70), whereas there were more widows (39) than widowers (19). This inequality in the civil status as a function of gender follows the same tendencies observed in representative samples of the Spanish population of older people (IMSERSO, 2006).

Most of the older people of our sample (61.0%) only had primary studies, and 34.3% reported having no studies. Only 3.8% had studied high school or other middle studies, and only two people had university studies. Regarding their economic level, 58.2% of the sample reported a monthly income of between 300 and 600€, 28.6% between 600 and 900€, 5.6% between 900 and 1200€ per month, 2.3% between 1200 and 1500€, and one person reported more than 1500€. In contrast, 4.7% of the sample reported receiving less than 300€ a month.

All the people of the sample had a high degree of autonomy. This was measured with the Hierarchical Autonomy Scale of Siu, Reuben, and Hays (1990). This scale, which is quick and simple to administer, is made up of 6 items referring to activities arranged from most (instrumental activities) to least difficult (basic activities). Only the people who performed all six activities autonomously were included in the final sample.

Instruments and Procedure

Daily activities and ideal activities. The instruments used to record daily activities was an adaptation of the Yesterday Interview (Moss & Lawton, 1982), which rates the frequency with which activities are performed and the time devoted to them. During the interview, participants are requested to recall what they did all day yesterday, starting with the

first activity upon getting up. The interviewer recorded each activity on a special list, when it started and ended, where it was performed, and the people who participated in the activity with the interviewee (if there were any). In the case of parallel activities (for example, watching TV and knitting), the interviewer registered each activity separately. The people with whom the activities were performed were only taken into account if the activity was actually shared with another person, not because of the mere presence of another person while the interviewee performed the activity. After collecting the data about the activities performed yesterday, using the same procedure, the interviewer asked about the activities the person would perform on an ideal day. Three interviewers participated in the data collection. Before they began to carry out the interviews, each interviewer was trained in the application to older people of two interview protocols and their subsequent discussion. The data from these training interviews were not included in the final database.

After data collection, based on the activities mentioned in the questionnaires by the interviewees, 36 different activities were identified, and in 7 of them, the moment when the person performed this activity was also noted in order to have a more detailed profile of the daily activities. Thus, for example, housework could be performed in the morning (until the interviewee's lunchtime), in the afternoon (until suppertime), or in the evening (until bedtime).

Subsequently, the activities were grouped into two typologies. Firstly, a general typology, that grouped all the activities into five types: (a) basic activities, (b) instrumental activities, (c) work-related activities, (d) leisure activities, and (e) resting. Secondly, the leisure activities were divided into three typologies, according to Lawton's (1993) classification: (a) experiential leisure (for example, watching TV or taking a sunbath), (b) social leisure (for example, talking or playing with another person), and (c) leisure related to development and that will somehow help the person to maintain, increase, or update their knowledge or skills (for example, attending training programs or doing sports).

Lastly, to ensure the reliability of the category system, we randomly extracted 30 response protocols from the total sample, 15 yesterday protocols and 15 ideal day protocols. Using this classification system, two encoders independently categorized the above-mentioned activities in these protocols. There was a high coincidence between them, with a Cohen's kappa index of .95.

Personal satisfaction. For this variable, we used the Life Satisfaction Index (LSI; Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961) in the version translated and validated in Spanish by Stock, Okun, and Gómez (1994). This instrument presents 20 statements that measure subjective well-being and about which participants indicate their agreement or disagreement. The LSI was administered by the interviewer, who read each statement and recorded the participants' agreement or disagreement.

Table 1

Frequency (in Percentage) with which the Diverse Categories of Activity are Mentioned and Average Minutes Dedicated to each Activity

Type of activity	Activity	Frequency of Mention (%)		Minutes (average)	
		Yesterday	Ideal day	Yesterday	Ideal day
Basic Activities	Personal care	16.2	19.0	37.1	46.5
	Self-care	65.3	64.4	32.2	39.5
	Dressing	7.4	6.5	32.8	78.2
	Breakfast	95.4	77.8	29.2	35.8
	Snack	7.4	3.7	42.5	52.5
	Dinner	98.6	95.8	65.3	95.9
	Snack	5.6	3.2	30.0	47.1
	Supper	97.2	94.4	48.4	53.4
<i>Average minutes for basic activities: 166.5 (SD = 52.48)</i>					
Instrumental Activities	Visits to the doctor	3.7	0.0	65.3	—
	Shopping in the morning	32.4	6.9	71.7	125.3
	Shopping in the afternoon	4.6	2.3	60.0	240.0
	Preparing lunch	48.6	18.5	75.5	90.0
	Preparing supper	43.5	16.7	57.7	53.5
	Housework in the morning	52.8	19.0	109.6	82.6
	Housework in the afternoon	45.4	10.2	80.7	75.7
	Housework in the evening	16.7	1.9	39.4	60.0
<i>Average minutes instrumental activities: 178.79 (SD = 134.41)</i>					
Leisure Activities	Cultural activities	0.5	9.3	90.0	160.5
	Educational activities	0.0	0.5	—	60.0
	Religious activities	19.0	13.4	69.5	69.1
	Hobbies in the morning	12.0	10.6	146.3	216.5
	Hobbies in the afternoon	25.5	12.5	139.4	202.2
	Going to shows	1.4	8.8	180.0	170.5
	Talking with others	37.0	43.5	108.2	141.8
	Taking care of animals	19.0	6.0	58.5	51.5
	Listening to music	0.5	0.9	90.0	90.0
	Listening to the radio	15.3	4.2	123.6	80.0
	Talking on the phone	0.9	0.9	30.0	12.5
	Doing sports	1.4	1.9	70.0	60.0
	Going on an excursion	0.0	3.7	—	660.0
	Traveling (away from home)	0.9	15.3	60.0	140.5
	Traveling (returning home)	0.0	9.3	—	60.0
	Playing	17.1	19.0	165.7	184.8
	Reading	10.6	10.2	126.7	117.3
	Walking in the morning	18.1	42.1	95.7	150.5
	Walking in the afternoon	25.9	36.1	86.8	146.0
	Taking a sunbath	3.7	0.5	112.5	120.0
Watching TV in the morning	42.1	18.5	121.5	112.0	
Watching TV in the afternoon	83.3	76.4	134.8	125.6	
Watching TV at night	65.7	35.6	154.3	144.0	
<i>Average minutes leisure activities: 466.12 (SD = 128.32)</i>					
Work Activities	Taking care of someone in the morning	11.1	3.2	67.1	124.3
	Taking care of someone in the afternoon	10.2	2.8	89.5	115.0
	Working in the morning	20.8	10.6	186.0	206.1
	Working in the afternoon	17.6	6.0	153.6	214.6
<i>Average minutes for work activities: 79.34 (SD = 62.25)</i>					
Resting Activities	Sleeping	100.0	100.0	544.8	556.5
	Napping	31.9	28.7	87.4	81.3
<i>Average minutes for resting: 563.12 (SD = 87.31.)</i>					

Participants were also asked about the frequency of their contacts with various people from their social environment (their children, relatives, neighbors, and friends), their perception of their health status (on a 5-point scale ranging from *very good* to *very poor*), and they answered three questions about their objective health status: current health problems (responding *yes* or *no* to the 14 most frequent health problems among elderly people), frequency of visits to the doctor, and number of medicines consumed regularly.

Results

Yesterday and the Ideal Day

As can be observed in Table 1, besides resting, yesterday's most frequently mentioned activities were associated with meals, personal care, watching TV, and housework. The same tendency was found in the ideal day activities, although activities such as taking a walk and going on a trip were mentioned more often for an ideal day, whereas watching TV and doing housework were less frequent. With regard to the percentage of time spent, some differentiated patterns were also observed, as in the case of the ideal day, people preferred to devote more time to traveling or to cultural activities, and less time to housework, talking on the phone, or listening to the radio, in comparison with the time spent on such activities yesterday.

The time spent on each activity yesterday and on the ideal day is graphically represented in Figure 1, which also shows the activities grouped according to the five types studied (basic, instrumental, work, leisure, and resting). We

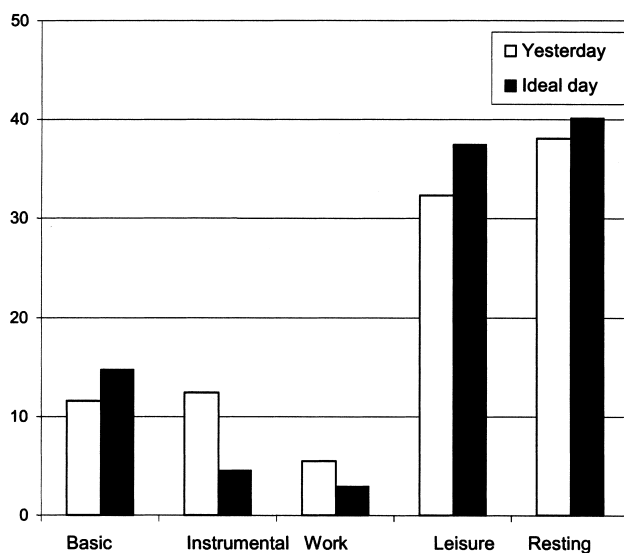


Figure 1. Percentage of time spent in each type of activity yesterday and on an ideal day.

performed Student's *t*-test for related groups and found that the difference between the percentage of time dedicated yesterday and the time foreseen on an ideal day was statistically and significantly different for all types of activities. Thus, on an ideal day, the old people preferred to perform more leisure activities (traveling and cultural activities), resting and even some basic activities (time dedicated to mealtimes, for example), whereas they would dedicate less time to instrumental activities (going to see the doctor and housework) and to working.

Lastly, the leisure activities found were subdivided according to Lawton's (1993) typology. Their distribution in time yesterday and on an ideal day can be seen in Figure 2.

Thus, on an ideal day, participants preferred to perform more social or developmental leisure activities and fewer experiential leisure activities. The differences between the percentage of time dedicated to the three types of leisure yesterday and that foreseen for an ideal day were statistically significant, even in the case where such differences were smaller, developmental leisure ($t = -2.583, p < .01$).

This decrease in time dedicated to experiential tasks on an ideal day is partially due to the decrease of more passive activities, such as watching TV or listening to the radio. Thus, participants spent more than four hours watching TV yesterday, practically one half of their leisure time (46.3%), while on an ideal day, watching TV only represented 27.9% of their leisure time.

The places where they carried out activities, both yesterday and on an ideal day, were grouped into three categories: at home (both one's own home or other people's home), where they spent an average of 675.5 minutes per

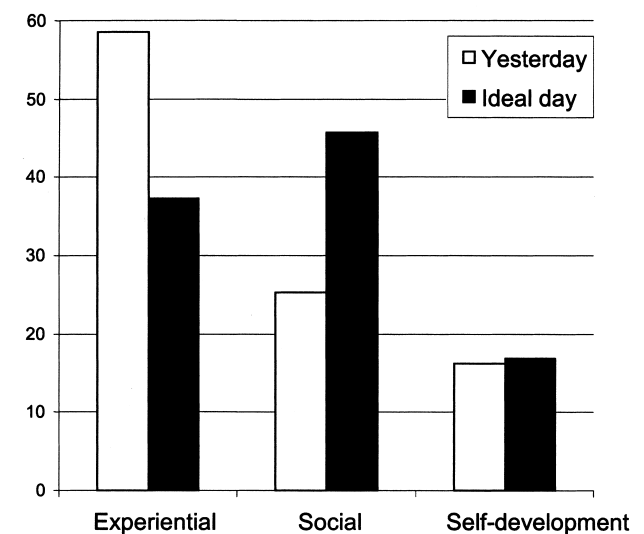


Figure 2. Distribution of leisure time as a function of the nature of the activity (experiential, social, and developmental) yesterday and on an ideal day.

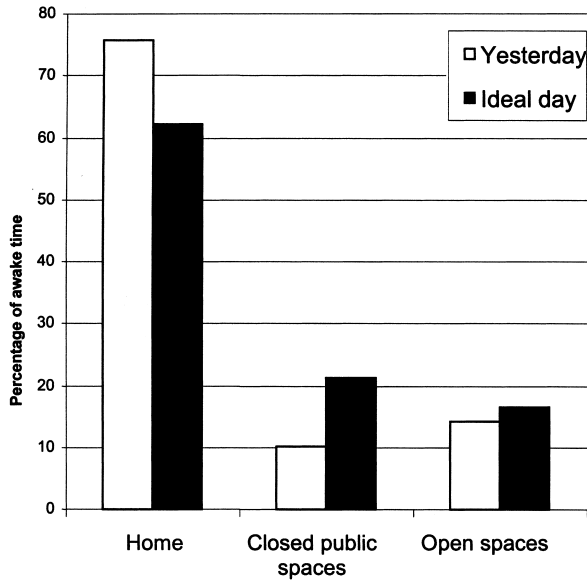


Figure 3. Percentage of awake time spent at the diverse places where the activity was carried out yesterday and on an ideal day.

day; closed public spaces (bars, markets, churches), where they spent an average of 89.7 minutes per day; and open spaces (streets, in the mountain, in a garden, in fields), where they spent an average of 125.7 minutes per day. The percentage of awake time spent in each of the places yesterday and on an ideal day can be seen in Figure 3.

In this case, there were important differences between yesterday and the ideal day: Whereas yesterday, the time spent at home (where almost 95% corresponds to time spent at one's own home) was approximately 75% of the awake time; this percentage decreased to somewhat more than 60% on an ideal day, with the time spent in closed public places particularly increasing. In the case of open spaces, the differences were not statistically significant.

Lastly, these variations between yesterday and the ideal day were also found in the company with whom the time was spent. In this case, we took into account time spent alone (an average of 473.5 minutes per day), with just the partner (an average of 195.7 minutes per day), with the family (an average of 141.4 minutes per day), and with friends or neighbors (an average of 80.1 minutes per day). As can be seen in Figure 4, more than 50% of the awake time yesterday was spent performing activities alone, a percentage that decreased by one half on an ideal day. This time would be dedicated to being with their partners, family, and friends, and in all cases, statistically significant differences were obtained.

The Impact of Sociodemographic Variables

To assess the impact of diverse variables on yesterday's activities, we performed a stepwise regression analysis, with

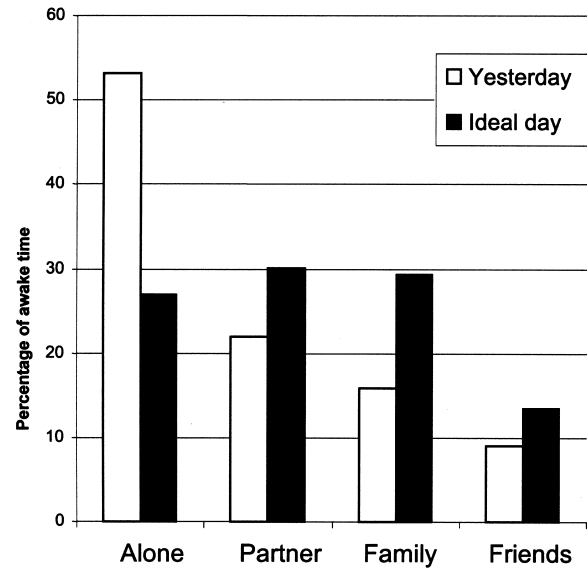


Figure 4. Percentage of awake time spent in diverse kinds of company yesterday and on an ideal day.

an F criterion of $p < .05$ to enter the equation and an F criterion of $p > .10$ to be excluded.

Regression analyses were performed for the three groups of dependent variables: the time in minutes dedicated to each type of activity, the minutes spent in diverse company, and the minutes spent in each of the three types of spaces. In all cases, the predictor variables included age, gender, civil status, educational level, level of income, estimated contact frequency with children, the rest of the family and friends and, lastly, two health indicators (number of reported health problems and number of medicines consumed regularly). The results of these analyses can be seen in Table 2.

In general, being female seemed to predict dedicating more time to instrumental activities and to experiential and developmental leisure activities. The women not only mentioned performing instrumental activities more often than the men (only half of the men mentioned them), but they also dedicated significantly more time than the men to this type of activity, $t = -8.001$, $p < .001$. The time spent working outside of the home, however, revealed the opposite tendency: the women mentioned this kind of activities less frequently (35% of the women vs. 45% of the men) and, particularly, when they did mention it, they dedicated less time than the men, $t = 2.975$, $p < .01$.

Age predicted less dedication to instrumental activities and, in contrast, more time dedicated to watching TV and resting. A lower educational level and less contact with friends seemed to predict more time spent on experiential leisure. Also noteworthy is the fact that the presence of more health problems seems to predict more time spent on basic activities.

Table 2

Stepwise Regression Coefficients of Sociodemographic Variables in Three Groups of Dependent Variables: Duration of each kind of Activity, Places where they take place, and with whom they are Performed

Dependent variables	Predictors										
	R ²	Age	Gender*	Civil status**	Educational level	Income	Frequency of social relations			Health status	
							Children	Family	Friends	N° illnesses	N° medicines
DURATION											
Basic	.07	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.34	—
Instrumental	.36	-0.31	0.45	—	—	—	—	—	0.17	—	—
Work	.31	—	-0.34	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leisure	.13	—	—	—	—	0.19	—	—	—	—	—
Experiential	.18	—	0.20	—	-0.18	—	—	—	-0.23	—	—
Watching TV	.09	0.23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Social	.08	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Developmental	.14	—	0.28	—	—	—	—	—	0.17	—	—
Resting	.17	0.26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
WHERE											
At home	.10	—	0.16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Closed public space	.16	—	-0.29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Open spaces	.09	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
WITH WHOM											
Alone	.24	—	0.31	0.33	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Children	.01	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Family	.12	—	—	—	—	—	0.27	—	—	—	—
Friends/neighbors	.27	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.37	—	—

Note. In all cases, time is measured in minutes. Only the coefficients with a significance level of less than .01 are specified. *Coded as male (0) and female (1). ** Coded as with partner (0) and without partner (1).

With regard to the places where the activity was performed, gender was the only predictor variable. Being female was related to spending more time at home and less time in closed public places. Moreover, being female also predicted spending more time alone, as did not being married.

Satisfaction and Daily Activities

The mean score in the LSI was 12.07 ($SD = 4.19$), which is comparable to Neugarten et al.'s (1961) result of 12.4 ($SD = 4.4$) and somewhat higher than that of 10.84 ($SD = 3.92$) from the validation study to Spanish and Catalan by Stock et al. (1994), although the latter included older people residing in geriatric centers, hence the lower mean scores.

The LSI scores correlated significantly, albeit modestly, with age ($r = -.194, p < .01$) and the educational level ($r = .153, p < .05$). Scores also tended to be higher in people who had a partner than in those with no partner ($t = 2.525, p < .05$), with the former reporting a lower number of medicines consumed regularly ($r = -.190, p < .05$) and, especially, among those who rated their health status higher ($r < .385, p = .001$). However, men and women scored similarly on the LSI, hence their scores did not seem to be

related to their economic level or the frequency of their social relations with friends and relatives.

With regard to the relation of life satisfaction with the time participants spent yesterday on the five large types of differentiated activities, only two statistically significant relations were obtained: people who dedicated more time to work tended to score higher on the LSI ($r = -.298, p < .001$). The time dedicated to the different types of leisure activities only reached statistical significance, and very moderately, in one case: the time dedicated yesterday to social leisure ($r = .150, p < .05$).

With regard to the places where the activities took place, neither the time reported yesterday nor the time desired on an ideal day at each place correlated with the LSI. Likewise, the time spent yesterday on each of the categories contemplated (partner, children, family, friends) did not correlate with life satisfaction.

In addition to the time spent on each of the activities, we wanted to determine whether the distance between yesterday and the ideal day had any impact on life satisfaction. For this purpose, we calculated the absolute value of the difference between the ideal time for each kind of activity and the real time that the person spent yesterday on that same kind of activity. The higher the indexes, the

more discrepancy between both days. The correlation of these values with the LSI score only reached statistical significance, albeit modest, in one case: the greater the discrepancy in the time dedicated to work, the lower the LSI scores ($r = -.166, p < .01$).

Discussion

There were three main goals in this work: to describe the activities on which our sample spends its time and to compare them with those they would *like* to perform, to determine the possible influence of sociodemographic variables and social network variables on these activities, and lastly, to determine the possible relation between daily activities (and to compare them with desired activities) and life satisfaction.

Yesterday's Activities and Activities on an Ideal Day

Yesterday's most frequently mentioned activities were those that can somehow be considered compulsory: basic activities (eating, sleeping) and, in the case of the women, also instrumental activities (shopping, housework). However, despite the high frequency, they only take up approximately one fourth of the daily time of the elderly people from rural contexts of this sample. The two types of activity that take up a higher percentage of daily time are leisure and resting. In the case of leisure, as these activities are optional, it seems that older people are more likely to be able to lead the life they choose. However, a more detailed examination of this leisure time provides a less optimistic view, as one activity takes up a large part of that time: watching TV. This is the result not only of the EUROSTAT (2008) report on how elderly Europeans use their time, but is also observed in studies that include data on how elderly people from Europe and the United States use their time (Gauthier & Smeeding, 2003). While not denying its relevance as a socialization and developmental element in some cases, this large amount of time dedicated to watching TV may preclude other activities that have a more direct relation with social and developmental aspects. This issue is even more important when we see that, when designing an ideal day, the elderly people of our sample assigned a minor role to watching TV. In fact, for them, the ideal day would be much more active and productive, not only because passive activities such as watching TV and obligatory activities such as housework would decrease but also because of their desire to spend more time outdoors or in company, and the emergence of other activities, such as going on excursions or educational activities, which were not mentioned in yesterday's report. One wonders whether the fact that they do not carry out such activities on a real day is due to personal or family obstacles or whether the rural environment itself accounts for this (for example, the limited educational

or tourism offer targeting these elderly people, or the low educational or economic level of our sample)

According to our results, another important type of activity in yesterday's daily pattern is working outside of the home and farming, especially in the case of the men. As mentioned in the introduction, in contrast to what is customary in the city, in many rural settings, retirement does not mean ceasing to work but instead, many old people continue to work (see results with urban samples in Villar, Triadó, Solé, & Osuna, 2006). This is even more important when we see that such activity is still present on an ideal day and we note its relation with life satisfaction; working in a rural environment reinforces the above-mentioned desire to remain active and productive.

Influence of Sociodemographic Variables

With regard to the second goal, determining the impact of the sociodemographic variables, gender was doubtless one of the key variables of our study. Its importance stems from its relation with the traditional division of labor between men and women. Thus, in this division, the female was dedicated to keeping house and caring for the children, while the male was mainly dedicated to earning resources outside of the home. In old age, the time dedicated to bringing up children and working outside of the home decreases drastically, whereas keeping house, a task assigned traditionally to women, is still necessary. According to our results, few men even mention instrumental activities (and if they do so, they dedicate little time to them).

With regard to age, and taking into account the limitations of a cross-sectional study to generalize developmental tendencies found, we observed that as people grow older, they tend to increase passive activities such as resting or watching TV, whereas the opposite tendency was observed for instrumental activities, which can involve a lot of energy.

Gender and age were better predictors than variables such as educational level, income, or health indicators, perhaps because the sample was relatively homogeneous in the latter variables. However, we observe that the people with higher incomes dedicated more time to leisure activities; obviously, income can be an important aspect when attempting to plan one's day according to one's desires.

Activities and Satisfaction

With regard to the third and last goal of this study, determining the relation between daily activities and life satisfaction, the values the LSI scores were in the medium-high range of the scale and had low or moderate relations with the other variables under study. These relations were only somewhat higher in the case of the subjective appraisal of health status—the second subjective measurement included in the study. The relative stability of life satisfaction could reflect underlying adaptation processes, which are

responsible for the fact that subjective measures of well-being and satisfaction usually maintain relatively high values, independently of the objective situation (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Brandtstädter & Greve, 1994; Staudinger, Marsiske, & Baltes, 1995).

The measurement of satisfaction also seems to be related both to the time dedicated to work and to the time dedicated to resting, although the relations presented opposite signs: positive in the former and negative in the latter case. This pattern suggests that productive activity (and, specifically, work) may have subjective benefits for elderly people, who do not appear to want to spend as much time as possible resting at this stage of their lives, in contrast to some stereotypes of ageing (see, for example, Fernández Ballesteros, 1992). Given that that working outside of the home is increasingly integrated in the daily lives of elderly people in rural settings (and especially, in elderly men), the relation between satisfaction and work provides this collective with opportunities that the elderly from urban environments do not have.

One assumes that the contrast between the activities actually performed and those one would like to perform could affect satisfaction, decreasing it if the distance between them is large, increasing it if both types of activity tend to overlap. Although the direction of the relations is coherent with this statement and, in one case, it was statistically significant (in work-related activities— which shows the importance of this kind of activity to maintain high satisfaction indexes), in our data, the magnitudes of these relations are very low. This low relation may be partially due to the fact that, as mentioned, there is not much difference between yesterday and the ideal day. Most of the people of our sample—especially if we take into account the kind of activities they would like to carry out and the time they would spend on them—seem to place the ideal day relatively close to yesterday. This limits the variability of the distances between them, which hinders their relation with measurements of satisfaction that, in turn, also present low levels of variability.

Although the measure of personal satisfaction we used has some advantages, among which are its simplicity and the fact that it is adapted to our language, it may contribute a partial view of the subjective experience of well-being. For example, two types of well-being have recently been differentiated (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1995): subjective well-being, which refers to feelings of happiness, and psychological well-being, which is more closely linked to feelings of self-realization and of having found a meaning to life. Although the LSI, as a measurement of personal satisfaction, is conceptually closer to subjective well-being, empirically speaking, it is not so clear and, to some extent, it seems to merge both types of well-being (Shmotkin, 1991). Given that the measurement of subjective well-being and psychological well-being could have different sources of influence and also a different evolution as people age (Villar,

Triadó, Solé, & Osuna, 2003), taking into account separate measurements for each one in future studies could contribute to clarifying the role of daily activities in old age.

Taken conjointly, the results of our work seem to point in two directions. First, the great similarity between how elderly people living in rural contexts actually spend their daily time and how they would like to spend it is noteworthy. This fact, which we also found in elderly people from urban environments (see, for example, Villar, Triadó, Solé, & Osuna, 2006), may be the key to maintaining personal satisfaction and could also reveal the great importance of leisure time at this stage of one's life, leisure time that, by definition, involves carrying out optional activities. Secondly, our data reveal the importance of the continuum activity-passivity in older people's preferences, expressed through the planning of an ideal day, and its relation with personal satisfaction. On the one hand, limiting the time spent resting and performing passive leisure activities (i.e., watching TV) and, on the other hand, maintaining some work activity and spending enough time in the company of others (especially of relatives) seems to be particularly valued by the older people of our sample. As working outside of the home is more likely in rural contexts than in urban ones, this could be one of the strengths of the elderly who live in such environments.

These results also have important implications for the design of interventions in this kind of contexts. Thus, our data suggest that the integration of productive activities (for example, work or similar activities) in the daily lives of older people and the promotion social activity that would prevent them from spending excessive time on passive leisure could be important ingredients in intervention programs targeting people at this stage of their lives.

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