

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FITNESS CONCEPT AND THE AREA OF FITNESS IN LATVIA AND THE WORLD

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Abstract. *Despite the great popularity of fitness around the world, it is still unclear what fitness is and how people understand it. The essence of fitness has gradually evolved from simple physical fitness to a cultural phenomenon. The second path of fitness development is from the physical health of a person reflected in a person's readiness to do physical work to the desire to improve their own quality of life. That is why the aim of this study was to investigate in depth the essential characteristics of the fitness concept and the area of fitness. The study is based on 41 literature sources and scientific articles, 8 of which are in Russian and 33 – in English. The essence of the content of the fitness concept has been investigated and the hierarchy of concepts has been evaluated in different theoretical contexts, starting from the historical beginning of the fitness concept. Definitions were grouped in a broader and a narrower sense: 1) fitness as a set of attributes and abilities and 2) fitness as a way of life, lifestyle and quality of life. The essential categories of the fitness concept were compiled. The change of fitness area and its influence on the society was discussed. By summarizing the analysis of fitness definitions and evaluating fitness according to various theoretical aspects, it can be concluded that fitness is interpreted as sport competition fitness, as an implementation of a healthy way of life and as physical fitness or health-oriented physical fitness. Due to constant change and improvement of the body ideal sometimes it is complicated to participate in the process of improving health, also achieving it requires a lot of energy and time. People don't understand where is the difference between healthy body and fitness body prepared for competition or commercial. Therefore the greater the beauty industry and fitness area becomes, the weaker becomes the human.*

Keywords: *fitness, lifestyle, physical condition, quality of life, way of life.*

Introduction

Fitness area becomes more and more popular all over the world. The essence of fitness has gradually evolved from simple physical fitness to a cultural phenomenon. The second path of fitness development is from the

physical health of a person reflected in a person's readiness to do physical work to the desire to improve their own quality of life.

Despite the great popularity of fitness around the world, it is still unclear as to what fitness is and how people understand it. Everyone understands fitness but nobody can precisely define it (Stearns, 1970). As found in a survey (Maguire, 2008), the question about what people mean when they say „I am fit” or „She is not fit” very rarely leads to a specific answer because everyone defines fitness within the limits of their competence.

That is why the aim of this study was to investigate in depth the essential characteristics of the fitness concept and the area of fitness.

The study is based on 41 literature sources and scientific articles, 8 of which are in Russian and 33 – in English. The essence of the content of the fitness concept has been investigated and the hierarchy of concepts has been evaluated in different theoretical contexts, starting from the historical beginning of the fitness concept. Definitions were grouped in a broader and a narrower sense: 1) fitness as a set of attributes and abilities and 2) fitness as a way of life, lifestyle and quality of life. The essential categories of the fitness concept were compiled.

Review of literature and discussion

The American term *fitness*, which dates back to the 20th century and has become popular today, is widely used in such fields as management, sociology, sport, medicine, biology, and it includes physical activity, recreation, rehabilitation, education (Сайкина, 2008) (see fig.1). However, the understanding of its essence varies.

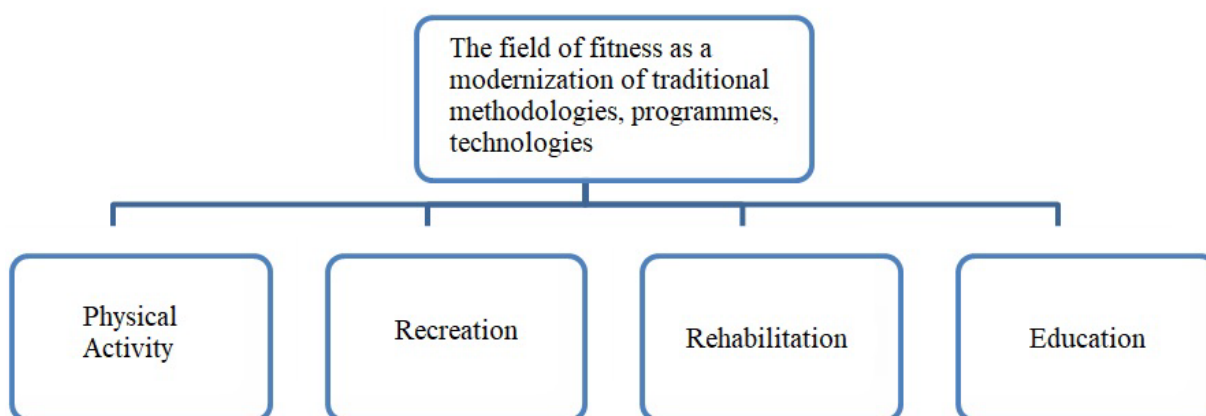


Figure 1 *Components of the Fitness Field* (source: Сайкина, 2008)

This can be explained by the fact that the phenomena described by the word *fitness* are different. In American society, fitness is viewed and understood in a much broader sense than in Latvia or other European countries. In Latvia, the word *fitness* does not have one definition, it is understood as physical fitness and ability to perform a particular activity, as a person's desire to be healthy and improve their quality of life or competitive sport.

Nowadays, the term *fitness* is often used to mark such categories as competitive sport fitness, health fitness to improve many aspects of quality of life, as well as to describe body shape and size, or more specifically – appearance (Maguire, 2008) and physical fitness. Fitness is omnipresent in North American culture – in sport, health, fashion, etc. (Petersen, 2007). Commercialization of athletes has increased (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003), and a moral panic has developed about the epidemic of obesity (Duncan, 2008), which also contributes to the public interest in fitness. On the other side exercise addiction and 'fitspiration' because of media influence on the public is a big problem in the area of fitness (Hill et al., 2015). There is no understanding and balance between what does it mean to be physically active for health and to be addicted to healthy lifestyle because of aggressive promotion of fitness for commercial purposes. People don't understand where is the difference between healthy body and fitness body prepared for competition or commercial (Slater et al., 2017; Boepple et al., 2016; Hill et al., 2015). The field of fitness and health is turning into a billion dollar industry which offers a huge range of services and products and it is not so easy to choose the right for each of person (Blood, 2005; Bordo, 1993; McIrvin Abu-Laban & McDaniel, 1995; Shilling, 2003; Maguire, 2008).

Fitness as a competition sport is not meant for everyone, as any other sport it requires acquisition of specific abilities and skills and observance of the lifestyle. It includes discipline, a specific daily regime, a strict diet and workout plan according to periodization, regular check-ups with a sports doctor, etc. Nowadays, most people perceive this sport as simple and suitable for everyone. Due to unqualified specialists in the field of fitness, many people who are not ready for this sport are prepared for it in a very short time, thus damaging their functional, psychological and physical condition. That is why it is very important to understand that fitness as a sport and fitness as a healthy way of life differ in terms of the goal, tasks and process.

The essence and goal of competition sport fitness is to participate in competitions, step on a stage, form the correct body proportions according to the particular category as regulated by the competition requirements (*IFBB Rules for Bodybuilding and Fitness*, 2014), obtain posing skills and health; there, each athlete has their own goal, possibilities, perception, needs and interests. Therefore, the values differ.

In the book „*Body Panic: Gender, Health and the Selling of Fitness*”, Shary L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs write that fitness for women has historically been associated with body reduction, endurance of the cardiovascular system, stretching exercises, while fitness for men has been associated with gaining muscle mass, weight lifting and competition. In other words, men tend to increase the upper part of their bodies, while women – to reduce the lower part of their bodies. (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Betz & Ramsey, 2017).

Currently fitness is undergoing a rapid change of trends with fitness programmes for women now including weight lifting, buttocks muscle training, high intensity loads. There are competitions where women compete in teams with men, together lifting weight bars, weight balls, dumbbells, throwing big car tires, and women are proud of the big weight they are able to lift. Women want to be strong, dominant, want to prove their equality (Boepple et al., 2016).

By analysing the essential characterization of the fitness concept found in literature, fitness is viewed in the study as:

1) a set of attributes and abilities – as in *to be fit* – ‘to be physically fit, in a good physical form’, or as in *physical fitness*, i.e. physical fitness, focused on specific attributes and abilities or health necessary for the performance of a specific task; for example, fitness is a set of attributes that relates to a person’s ability to perform physical activity (Caspersen et al., 1985); fitness is the general state of health and well-being, the ability to meet specific requirements in sport or everyday life (Malina, 2010); fitness is one of the most important indicators of work capacity, which is the ability to fulfil a task and achieve a specific goal without excessive fatigue, without harming oneself or others (Sharkey & Gaskill, 2009); fitness is the ability to safely and efficiently carry out simple, as well as specific requirements in everyday life without excessive fatigue so that there is still energy for rest and recreation events (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2006); fitness is a state of physical and physiological attributes, which shows the risk of obtaining premature illnesses and is related to sedentary lifestyle (Bouchard & Shephard, 1994); fitness is the balance of physical, mental and social attributes that provides the necessary reserves, which provide the ability to live in harmony with the environment in everyday life without an excessive physical and mental load (Travis & Callander, 1990) etc.;

2) a way of life, lifestyle and quality of life – as a life-influencing factor that includes the desire to improve health and quality of life and that includes not only physical fitness, but also a broader range of characteristics; for example, fitness is a healthy, active, beautiful and attractive lifestyle associated with life success and youth (Паффенбаргер & Ольсен, 1999); fitness is a way of life that provides an opportunity to maintain and strengthen health, balance the emotional state, improve the physical form and promote an active lifestyle

(Лисицкая & Сиднева, 2002); fitness is a cultural phenomenon of the 20th century and the desire to improve the quality of life to an optimal level, which includes social, psychical, mental and physical components (Howley & Frenks, 1998); fitness is a way of life that includes physically mental activity aimed at regulating the psychical and mental state (Kravitz & Robergs, 1993).

By evaluating the essential characterization of the concept of fitness as a set of attributes and abilities, it can be concluded that any fitness definition may also include components related to health and/or physical activity. The components of fitness and physical fitness overlap and form components of the state of physical health. According to the definitions, a health-oriented physical fitness is the body of innate and acquired morphological and functional properties of the organism (Рогинский, 1963) and the ability to perform daily activities without excessive fatigue, which reduces the risk of prematurely developing a hypokinetic illness (Hoeger & Hoeger, 2006) or illnesses caused by immobility (Vanhees et al, 2005; Pate, 1988), and reflects the readiness and adaptation of the body system functions for the performance of a particular activity (Быков, 2009). Being in a good physical form means to be healthy, but it is impossible to be healthy if the person is not in a good physical form, which depends on the person's lifestyle.

In order to understand the essence of the concept of fitness as a way of life, lifestyle and quality of life, it is necessary to understand the hierarchy of these concepts. The determinants of a person's way of life are not only objective factors such as work or studies, family life, social life, cultural affiliation and behavioural habits, but also subjective factors that are described as a person's satisfaction with their way of life, which forms based on a person's knowledge and confidence. The understanding of a way of life is formed by four categories:

- 1) economic – standard of living,
- 2) sociological – quality of life,
- 3) sociopsychological – lifestyle,
- 4) socio-economic – living habits (Возьмитель, 2000).

Thus, lifestyle is one of the categories of a way of life. Lifestyle is evaluated according to a person's habits of spending their leisure and work time, their way of organizing everyday life, behaviour type, values, taste and other factors (Ефимов, 1982).

Quality of life is another category of a way of life, which is the satisfaction of an individual's values and interests as goals and needs with updating the person's abilities or lifestyle (Emerson, 1985).

Therefore, a healthy way of life is behaviour and habits that positively affect health and it includes:

- 1) observing a healthy diet (Bailey et al., 2013; Ильинский, 1996; Bourdieu, 1980; *WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its forty-eighth session, Copenhagen, September, 1998*),
- 2) health promoting physical activity (Hutson, 2012; Shilling, 1991; Ильинский, 1996; Bourdieu, 1980; *WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its forty-eighth session, Copenhagen, September, 1998*),
- 3) other social activities in society (Shilling, 1991), which is an additional indicator of a healthy way of life – characterisation of environment and social life.

By evaluating the essence of the fitness concept as a way of life, lifestyle and quality of life and by analysing the hierarchy of the way of life concept it can be concluded that fitness is a healthy way of life and includes the implementation of health promoting behaviour and habits (see fig.2).

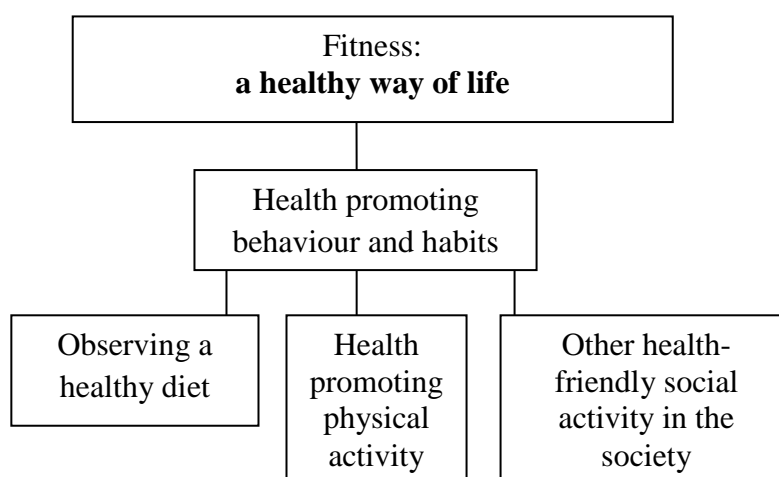


Figure 2 Structure of Fitness as an Implementation of a Healthy way of life

It can be assumed that fitness as an implementation of a healthy way of life involves improving the quality of life as a health promoting behaviour with a tendency to improve one's well-being and lifestyle as a development of new habits for health promotion. It can be concluded that in fitness as an implementation of a healthy way of life there is no place for harmless training programmes and overload, strict diet plans or use of steroids to get a desired body.

Recently there have been rapid changes in people's attitude towards fitness and in conversations about it. Knowledge of exercises, health, well-being, obesity, body mass index, calories, nutrition, vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins, carbohydrates, etc. is now important in everyday life. In the field of fitness,

people are encouraged to pay attention not only to their bodies, but also to health, calling for the purchase of services and products of the fitness and health industry. It is no longer fashionable for fitness enthusiasts to use tobacco and alcoholic products, or to visit nightclubs. The so-called turn to a healthy lifestyle has happened. However, in spite of all this, there is still an epidemic of immobility and obesity in the world (WHO, 2014) and on the other side exercise addiction or eating disorders.

Due to the obesity crisis, the beauty ideal is becoming more and more equal to the health ideal, a beautiful body means a healthy organism. If people look good, then they also feel good (Duncan, 2008; Markula & Pringle, 2006).

The correlation between suggestions on health improvement and the beauty ideal confirms suspicion that to look good (an ideal body) and to feel good (a healthy body) is the same. This is why a person's health can also be assessed by the body's visual characteristics – body mass and body composition.

Good health has become a visible sign, which is evidenced by a slim, athletic body. However, in some cases the body mass is a poor indicator of the health state (Zanker & Gard, 2008).

In North America, obesity has become the opposite of fitness (*fatness – fitness*) (Scott-Dixon, 2008). Some authors believe that obesity is associated with laziness, lack of control, unruliness, mental problems (Bordo, 1993; Petersen, 2007). The essence of marketing in the field of fitness is: if a person does not look good, then they cannot feel good because they are not in a good shape; this encourages people to buy products and services, thus developing this area.

The blend of health and beauty complicates a human's participation in the process of improving health of the society because the ideal of a body is constantly changing and improving; achieving it requires a lot of energy and a lot of time. The greater the beauty industry and fitness area becomes, the weaker becomes the human.

Conclusions

By summarizing the analysis of fitness definitions and evaluating fitness according to various theoretical aspects, it can be concluded that fitness is interpreted as sport competition fitness, as an implementation of a healthy way of life and as physical fitness or health-oriented physical fitness.

The essence and goal of competition sport fitness is to participate in competitions, step on stage, form the correct body proportions according to the particular category as regulated by the competition requirements, obtain posing

skills, each athlete has their own goal, possibilities, perception, needs and interests. Therefore, the values differ.

By evaluating the concept of fitness as physical fitness, it can be concluded that the components of fitness and physical fitness overlap and form components of the state of physical health. Any definition of fitness may also include components related to health and/or physical activity.

Fitness as an implementation of a healthy way of life includes health promoting behaviour and habits – observing a healthy diet, health promoting physical activity and other health-friendly daily social activities in society. It can be assumed that fitness as an implementation of a healthy way of life involves improving the quality of life as a health promoting behaviour with a tendency to improve one's well-being and a lifestyle as a development of new habits for health promotion.

Due to constant change and improvement of the body ideal sometimes it is complicated to participate in the process of improving health, also achieving it requires a lot of energy and time. People don't understand where is the difference between healthy body and fitness body prepared for competition or commercial. Therefore the greater the beauty industry and fitness area becomes, the weaker becomes the human.

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