

Original Scientific Article

**PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES, AND PERSPECTIVES OF VISITORS
OF WELLNESS CENTERS AS A COMPONENT OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE:
A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY**

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Abstract. *The concept of wellness encompasses various dimensions of health, aiming to promote proactive and preventive behavior for overall well-being. This cross-sectional study investigated the characteristics and benefits of visiting wellness centers. A total of 186 participants (average age of 41.31±10.475, including 49 males and 137 females) in Serbia were included, and data were analyzed using the Pearson χ^2 (chi-square) test and independence test. The questionnaire was distributed from 25 to 31 December 2022. Results revealed no significant associations between age, gender, education, and marital status, but monthly income showed significant differences ($p=0.002$). Wellness was found to positively contribute to the physical, mental, and social aspects of health. The main motivators for visiting wellness centers were relaxation, reduction of mental tension, and travel for happiness and pleasure ($p=0.001$). Wellness centers were identified as promoting a preventive and proactive approach to lifestyle improvement, with 97.2% of respondents acknowledging its positive impact. The pleasure of free time and the desire to escape from everyday life were crucial motivators among Serbian wellness center visitors ($p=0.013$). These findings highlight the role of wellness centers in promoting proactive and preventive approaches to improve physical, mental, and social well-being. The main motivators for visiting wellness centers were identified as relaxation, reduction of mental tension, and travel for happiness and pleasure, with pleasure with free time and escape from everyday life being key motivators among visitors in Serbia.*

Key words: *Wellness, lifestyle, well-being, attitudes, health, relaxation.*

Introduction

The concepts of well-being, healthy lifestyle, and wellness share the common goal of promoting and preserving health. Well-being is achieved by addressing the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of individuals [1]. The Mueller and Kaufmann model serves as the foundation for the idea of wellness-related lifestyles, which encompasses various aspects such as social interaction, diet, travel, fitness, holistic approach to life, and environmental protection [2]. Well-being includes multiple facets such as happiness, personal development, finding life's purpose, and relationships with others, which can have both positive and negative impacts [3]. Life satisfaction is influenced by the emotional state developed in various domains, including relaxation, community engagement, love, culture, spirituality, home, and job [4]. The literature also discusses the experiences of visitors to spa and wellness centers concerning their perception of well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness [5].

There is a direct correlation between healthy lifestyles and travel motives, particularly in the context of wellness centers, which focus on psychological, spiritual, and social effects [5]. Crompton (1979) posits that travel motives can be understood along a socio-psychological-cultural continuum [6]. Those who visit wellness centers often exhibit a proactive attitude and intention to maintain or improve their health through preventive measures [7]. Wellness users typically take a responsible approach to their health, incorporating various elements such as physical activity, healthy diet, relaxation, mindfulness, cosmetic care, enhanced mental activity, knowledge, and social interaction into their daily lives [8].

Wellness tourism encompasses travel undertaken to maintain and enhance one's well-being [9]. It is closely related to health tourism, as both aim to improve or maintain overall health through various means such as hedonistic relaxation through spa treatments, utilization of natural healing factors such as mineral waters and peloids, and complementary medical services including alterna-

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tive and traditional medicine. Additionally, wellness tourism may involve rehabilitation, physical therapy, fitness activities, and healthy eating practices [10]. Modern spas and wellness centers can serve as environments where visitors can prioritize their enjoyment, enhance relaxation skills, and find an escape from the stress and demands of daily life. These facilities can offer opportunities for self-development and serve as havens for health and wellness [11]. The global growth of wellness tourism is driven by emerging trends in healthcare, which emphasize proactive, comprehensive, and preventive approaches to personal well-being, including physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects [9]. Examples of these changing perspectives include the increasing popularity of training programs, yoga, tai chi, and meditative exercises. Many companies, including healthcare facilities, recognize the significant benefits of a healthy lifestyle in terms of increased productivity and are increasingly incorporating lifestyle medicine into clinical settings, particularly in the areas of nutrition, diet, exercise, and stress management.

Our study aimed to investigate the profile of wellness center visitors and explore the role of socio-demographic characteristics in their visitation patterns. Recognizing that wellness users are a diverse group, we sought to understand who visits these centers, what motivates their visits, and how life satisfaction influences their choices. Additionally, we hypothesized that wellness travel has a positive impact on all aspects of health, including physical, mental, and social dimensions. We also speculated that the millennial generation, often referred to as Generation Y, constitutes a significant portion of consumers of wellness services. Lastly, we hypothesized that the preservation of health is a primary motivator for visiting wellness centers.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted as a cross-sectional study, following a review of relevant literature on spa and wellness tourism. The questionnaire used in this study was inspired by and modeled after previous research conducted by Mak et al. (2009), Clark-Kennedy et al. (2017), and Chen et al. (2014) [2, 12, 13]. The questionnaire was initially prepared in English and then translated into Serbian. A pretest was conducted on 5% of participants at Lady-fit studio in Kraljevo, Serbia, and modifications were made based on the findings. The final instrument was an online questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part collected socio-demographic information from the respondents, and those who did not visit spa and wellness destinations were excluded from further analysis. The second part included questions about the respondents' attitudes towards lifestyle improvement through activities such as water-based therapies, fitness, healthy eating, relaxation, and pampering at spas and wellness centers. A five-point Likert scale was used for certain answers, with options ranging from '1 - I strongly disagree' to '5 - I completely agree.' Other questions explored motives for traveling to spas and wellness centers, as well as

expectations of tourists regarding the offerings and services. Data obtained from the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23.00. Confidentiality of data was maintained at all levels of the study, and the data were solely used for this study. The questionnaire was distributed between December 25 and 31, 2022, and the survey was conducted in Serbian language among wellness center users in Serbia.

Results

The study included 186 participants, average age of 41.31 ± 10.475 , male 49 and female 137. The structure of respondents by sociodemographic characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Social and demographic parameters

Social and demographic parameters (N=186)	f	%
Gender		
Female	137	73.7
Male	49	26.3
Age*	41.31±10.475	(18-66)
≤ 24	6	3.2
25 - 30	30	16.1
31 - 36	25	13.4
37 - 42	37	19.9
43 - 48	27	14.5
49 - 54	42	22.6
55 - 60	16	8.6
≥ 61	3	1.6
Education		
Primary school	1	0.5
High school	55	29.6
Faculty	108	58.1
Postgraduate studies	22	11.8
Monthly income (dinars)		
< 30.000	17	9.1
30.000 - 50.000	33	17.7
50.000 - 100.000	83	44.6
> 100.000	23	12.4
I do not want to declare	30	16.1
Marital status		
Unmarried	84	45.2
Married	102	54.8
Do you visit wellness centers?		
Yes	109	58.6
No	77	41.4

*AS±SD (Min-Max)

We analyzed whether there were differences in the popularity of wellness centers concerning sociodemographic characteristics. The results are given in Table 2.

The results of testing the differences in the frequency of visits to wellness centers according to sociodemographic characteristics revealed a significant difference only in monthly income ($p < 0.01$). Testing for differences in the frequency of visits to wellness centers by age was conducted to test hypotheses about millennials, but did not

Table 2 Sociodemographic factors influence the popularity of wellness facilities' difference

Do you visit wellness centers?		Yes	No	χ^2	df	p-value
		109 (58.6%)	77 (41.4%)			
Gender	Female	84 (61.3%)	53 (38.7%)	1.576	1	0.209
	Male	25 (51.0%)	24 (49.0%)			
Age	Generation Y - millennials	45 (60.0%)	30 (40.0%)	0.101	1	0.750
	Other	64 (57.7%)	47 (42.3%)			
Education	Primary school	28 (50.0%)	28 (50.0%)	2.557	2	0.278
	High school	68 (63.0%)	40 (37.0%)			
	Postgraduate studies	13 (59.1%)	9 (40.9%)			
Monthly income (dinars)	< 30.000	10 (58.8%)	7 (41.2%)	15.157**	3	0.002
	30.000 - 50.000	10 (30.3%)	23 (69.7%)			
	50.000 - 100.000	55 (66.3%)	28 (33.7%)			
	>100.000	17 (73.9%)	6 (26.1%)			
Marital status	Unmarried	50 (59.5%)	34 (40.5%)	0.054	1	0.817
	Married	59 (57.8%)	43 (42.2%)			

show a significant difference. Participants provided opinions about preventive and proactive ways of living and well-being in the context of wellness (Table 3).

Table 3 Perspectives on wellness facilities

Perspectives on wellness centers (N=109)	f	%
With water, exercise, diet, rest, and indulgence, wellness promotes a preventive, proactive way of living		
I have no attitude	3	2.8
I partially agree	14	12.8
I agree	92	84.4
The three facets of well-being, mental, and social—are impacted by wellness		
I have no attitude	3	2.8
I partially agree	14	12.8
I agree	92	84.4

The frequencies in Table 3 showed that 84.4% of respondents believed that wellness provides a preventive,

proactive way of living as well as affecting the physical, mental, and social dimensions of health.

The benefits and motives for utilizing wellness centers are shown in Tables 4 and Table 5.

The above-mentioned results showed that relaxation, reduction of mental tension, and travel for happiness and pleasure were significant motivators. On the other hand, the attractiveness of the destination and the motive of hanging out with friends were not significant reasons to visit wellness centers.

The aesthetic dimension of the offer, entertainment, and other (food, shopping, relaxation, treatment, rest) was not crucial in choosing the destination. Much more attention was paid to one's sense of pleasure with free time and the need to escape from everyday life (Table 6).

Participants' opinion on relaxation-enhancing elements in hot spring water in wellness centers is given in Table 7.

The appropriate water temperature as well as its mineral composition had crucial importance to the respondents (p=0,013), followed by water purity. The sound of water was of minor importance.

Table 4 The benefits of visiting wellness centers

Your reasons for visiting wellness centers are: *	Answers (N=109)		% respondents	χ^2	df	p-value
	f	%				
Preservation of health	10	8.5%	9.2%	177.254	3	0.001
Relaxation	92	78.0%	84.4%			
Active vacation	11	9.3%	10.1%			
The beauty and attractiveness of the destination	5	4.2%	4.6%			

* Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer

Table 5 Motives for visiting wellness centers

Your aims for accessing wellness centers are: *	Answers (N=109)		% respondents	χ^2	df	p-value
	f	%				
Physical relaxation	18	15.3%	16.5%	37.678	4	0.001
Reduction of mental tension	39	33.1%	35.8%			
Travel for happiness and pleasure	36	30.5%	33.0%			
Enjoyment and fun	23	19.5%	21.1%			
Hanging out with friends	2	1.7%	1.8%			

* Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer

Table 6 Opinion on the offer of wellness centers

It means to me that the wellness offers effective: *	Answers (N=109)		% respondents	χ^2	df	p-value
	f	%				
Pleasure in free time	43	36.4%	39.4%	59.458	4	0.001
Escape from everyday life	45	38.1%	41.3%			
The aesthetic dimension of the offer	11	9.3%	10.1%			
Entertainment	12	10.2%	11.0%			
Other (food, shopping, relaxation, treatment, rest)	7	5.9%	6.4%			

* Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer

Table 7 Relaxation-enhancing elements in hot spring water are

Your aims for accessing wellness centers are: *	Answers (N=109)		% respondents	χ^2	df	p-value
	f	%				
Water purity	27	22.3%	24.8%	10.802	3	0.013
Temperature of water	40	33.1%	36.7%			
The sound of water	17	14.0%	15.6%			
Mineral composition of water	37	30.6%	33.9%			

* Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer

Discussion

We found that the popularity of wellness centers was directly correlated with the monthly income of respondents ($p=0.02$), but not with other socio-demographic characteristics. Our study confirmed the hypothesis that wellness travel contributes to various aspects of health, including physical, mental, and social dimensions. A significant majority (97.2%) of respondents who visit wellness centers believed that wellness promotes a preventive and proactive lifestyle, and positively impacts their physical, mental, and social well-being. However, our hypothesis that millennials (often referred to as Generation Y) are the largest consumers of wellness services did not show a significant difference and was not confirmed. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, preserving health was not found to be the main reason for visiting wellness centers. Instead, relaxation, reducing mental tension, and seeking happiness and pleasure through travel were identified as significant motivators. The attractiveness of the destination and hanging out with friends were not significant factors influencing visits to wellness centers. The primary determinant in choosing a destination was the sense of pleasure and escape from everyday life during free time ($p=0.001$). Respondents also considered the water temperature and mineral composition of the destination to be crucial factors in their choice ($p=0.013$), while the sound of water was found to be of minor importance.

Satisfaction is often positively correlated with the likelihood of revisiting or repurchasing wellness destinations. Clark-Kennedy et al. (2017) study found that the majority of visitors to wellness facilities were motivated by relaxation (99%), a sense of peace (95%), joy (88%), escapism (86%), overall health benefits (77%), and a connection with nature (74%) as their top reasons [13]. These findings are consistent with a similar study conducted with spa visitors in Hong Kong, where the main motivating factors were leisure, relaxation, escapism,

self-reward, hedonism, wellness, and aesthetics [12, 13]. The results indicate that visitors seek to unwind and experience the new amenities offered by renovated facilities during their vacation time, in addition to enjoying the health benefits of swimming. In addition to the unique attributes of geothermal water, the facility's features, such as landscaping, pool design, surrounding environment, local plants, and biodiversity, were identified as significant drivers for visits [13].

Visitors to wellness centers typically seek to enhance their quality of life and well-being, as leisure and relaxation are often considered key components of a vacation. Most travelers embark on their journeys with the hope of enjoying themselves, feeling better than they do at home, and having a generally great time. The significance of enjoyment and fun should not be understated in the context of wellness tourism [14]. Indeed, the impact of wellness tourism on individuals' quality of life and well-being is one of the key aspects of the sector [4]. The experience of spa and wellness activities contributes to visitors' satisfaction during their free time, which in turn can affect their overall perception of satisfaction and quality of life beyond that time [15]. In a study by Voigt et al., 61% of respondents completed university [16], which aligns with the results of our study, where 58.1% of participants had a university education.

Segmentation of wellness visitors is based on factors such as motivation, expected benefits, and perception of wellness facilities [17]. The connection between user experience, leisure satisfaction, and quality of life is significant in the realm of wellness. Wellness encompasses more than just physical health and good nutrition; it also includes personal enrichment, which satisfies consumer desires for escape from monotony and escapism. In addition to well-established activities such as spa and wellness, new types of escapism are being developed and marketed [15]. The concept of selfness can be interpreted as a common thread that connects the desired advantages

for wellness visitors [16]. Other researchers have also explored the meaning of the self in the context of health- or spirituality-related travel [18, 19]. For example, Smith et al. (2006) noted that those who engage in wellness may see it as an inner journey that places greater emphasis on the self rather than external factors [19]. Similarly, German scholar Horx has argued that the next big trend will be self-respect, which he views as a strategy for self-improvement that involves self-discovery and ongoing enhancement of one's capabilities and individuality, rather than selfishness [20]. According to Horx, travelers are seeking self-transformation and associate it with the benefits of wellness [20]. In a similar study conducted in Hong Kong, relaxation was found to be the main motivating factor for visiting wellness centers [12].

The concept of a wellness-related lifestyle encompasses various dimensions of health, including physical, psychological, social, and spiritual, which are crucial in research on individual well-being [3, 21]. Delaying negative outcomes of frailty in the elderly is important [22], and education can play a key role in prevention, resulting in improved outcomes for both individuals and society as a whole [23]. Iso-ahola et al. (1982) proposed a theory that individuals are motivated by the search for pleasure and escape from routine [24], and our study's findings support this research.

It is important to acknowledge certain potential limitations of our study. Firstly, the sample was selected randomly, which means that our findings are not generalizable to the entire Serbian population. Moreover, participants in our study may have been more motivated to spend money on spa treatments and wellness activities compared to the average person. Additionally, our study only considered individuals who could afford a wellness vacation, which may have influenced their attitudes and opinions. The questionnaire was designed to limit re-

spondents from expressing their personal opinions beyond the questions provided. Lastly, the sample size of the study and potential gender imbalance, assuming more female than male participants, should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Conclusion

It was found out that wellness centers provide preventive, proactive lifestyle improvement as well as affect the physical, mental, and social dimensions of health. The findings of our study revealed relaxation, reduction of mental tension, and travel for happiness and pleasure were the main motivators to visit wellness centers. It was concluded that the crucial motive of wellness users was the sense of pleasure with free time and the need to escape from everyday life. Our study emphasizes the importance of wellness centers in promoting preventive measures for overall health and well-being. These centers provide relaxation, pleasure, and escape from everyday stress, while at the same time address emotional and social aspects of health. Wellness centers can play a vital role in preserving public health by prioritizing self-care and promoting physical, mental, and social well-being. By recognizing and addressing the motivators behind wellness center visits, we can better understand the importance of incorporating preventive measures into public health strategies. Policymakers and healthcare professionals must acknowledge the significance of wellness centers and prioritize wellness practices in public health initiatives. Investing in preventive measures that prioritize wellness can lead to a healthier and more resilient population, ultimately improving public health outcomes. Let's work towards a future where wellness is prioritized and accessible for all.

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