

Analyzing the Interior Design and Furniture Status in Bulgarian Retirement Homes

Maria Kitchoukova

University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria

Email: mkitchoukova@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This current study offers a comprehensive analysis of the current state of interior design and furniture in retirement homes within Bulgaria. The quality and design of interiors and furniture play a crucial role in ensuring the well-being, comfort, and safety of the elderly population. In Bulgaria, these aspects have received minimal attention and need thorough examination. Through a mixed-methods research approach combining surveys, observational studies, and in-depth interviews, this study delves into the existing conditions of interiors and furniture in Bulgarian retirement homes. The factors evaluated include the aesthetics, comfort, functionality, and safety of the interior design and furniture, along with their suitability to the specific needs and physical abilities of the residents.*

Keywords: accessible environment, disadvantaged people, retirement homes, interior design, furniture status.

1. Introduction

In today's aging society, the importance of providing adequate and comfortable living conditions for the elderly population cannot be overstated. One aspect of these living conditions that plays a crucial role in the well-being, safety, and overall quality of life of the elderly is the interior design and furniture in retirement homes. Good design and appropriate furniture are not just about aesthetics, but also about functionality, comfort, and adaptability to the specific needs of the elderly.

In Bulgaria, a country with an increasing elderly population (WHO, 2021), retirement homes have become an important part of the social infrastructure. However, there has been relatively limited attention paid to the status of interior design and furniture in these facilities. There is a need to examine whether these interiors meet the standards of a safe and comfortable living environment and if they align with the best practices of elderly-friendly design.

This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the current state of interior design and furniture in Bulgarian retirement homes. Employing a mixed-methods approach, it explores the extent to which the existing conditions align with the residents' needs and globally accepted best practices. Through surveys, survey, and stakeholder interviews, the study attempts to paint a vivid picture of the current situation, as well as map out potential avenues for improvement.

2. Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive mixed-methods (Creswell J., 1994) approach to analyze the status of interior design and furniture in Bulgarian retirement homes. This involved both qualitative and quantitative research methods to ensure a thorough exploration of the issue at hand.

a) Data Collection:

Surveys: Structured questionnaires were administered to a broad sample of retirement home residents and staff

members across different regions of Bulgaria. The survey included questions on the quality, functionality, comfort, safety, and aesthetic appeal of the interior design and furniture in these homes. Site Visits: Direct observational studies were conducted in a selection of retirement homes. These site visits allowed to assess the state of the interior and furniture first-hand, observing elements such as the layout, accessibility, furniture quality, lighting, color schemes, and overall atmosphere.

b) Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: Survey responses were statistically analyzed to identify patterns and trends in the perceptions of different stakeholders about the status of interior design and furniture in Bulgarian retirement homes. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to provide a quantitative summary of the data. Qualitative Analysis: Data gathered from observational studies and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach facilitated the identification of common themes, issues, and potential solutions as suggested by different stakeholders.

c) Ethical Considerations:

The study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. All participants provided informed consent, and the data collected were anonymized during analysis to preserve participant privacy. The combination of these methodologies ensured that the research was grounded in real-world observations and perspectives, allowing for a detailed understanding of the current state of interior design and furniture in Bulgarian retirement homes.

3. Survey of the Interior Design and Furniture Status in Bulgarian Retirement Homes

Surveys form an integral part of the research methodology when analyzing the Interior Design and Furniture Status in Bulgarian Retirement Homes. They provide a wealth of data that can be used to inform decisions, drive improvements, and ultimately enhance the living conditions for the residents in these homes.

Volume 12 Issue 6, June 2023

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

The survey was addressed directly to users in social institutions and was implemented in the period 2021 - 2022, with 100 respondents interviewed, and the answers processed using Excel.

The survey includes 18 questions related to the social situation and the accessibility of the architectural and living environment of homes for the elderly.

The survey found that 58% of the residents of these homes are aged 75 - 85 years, followed by the 68 - 75 age group with 30%, and 12% are over 85 years old. The gender distribution is respectively 48% men and 52% women (fig.1).

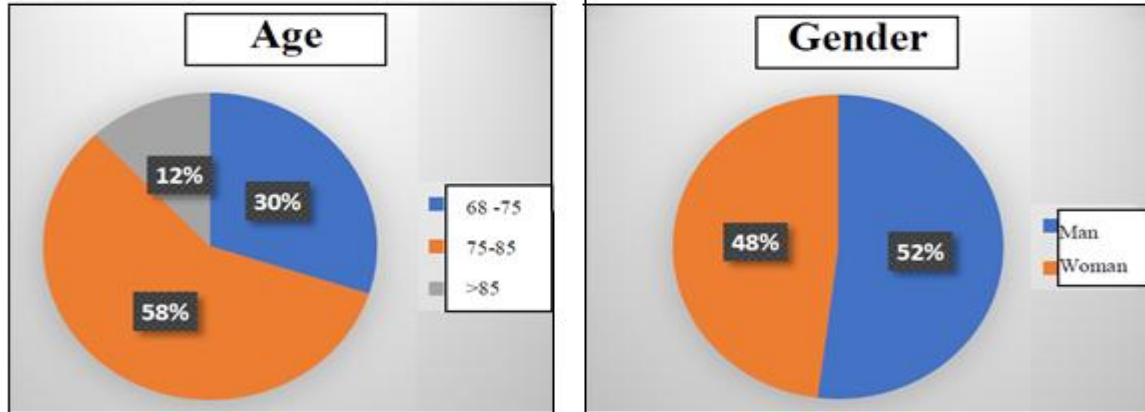


Figure 1: Percentage ratio based on age and gender of the survey participants

It is important to note that when asked about the presence of a physical limitation, the respondents were assigned to more than one group. The largest is the group with disorders of the musculoskeletal system - 52%, followed by the group with sensory disorders (hearing/sight/speech) - 30%, and 7% are classified as cognitively impaired. 11% note that they have no physical limitations (Fig.2). Taking into account this distribution by group of the residents of the homes for the elderly, it is not surprising that they rate the degree of comfort and practicality of the environment they live in. Mass disapproval is noted, with 40% giving a rating of 2 /according to the five - point system/, and 30% - 3. The opinion of 15% of the respondents, who express extreme dissatisfaction and give a rating of 1, should not be ignored. At the other extreme are the same number of respondents who gave a rating of 4 - 10% and a rating of 5 - 5% respectively (Fig.3).

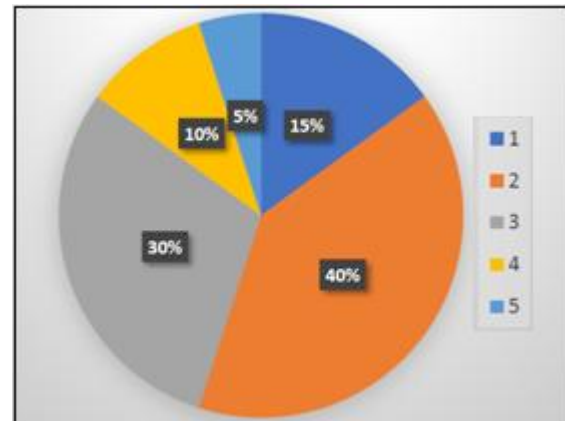


Figure 3: Percentage ratio according to the degree of comfort and practicality

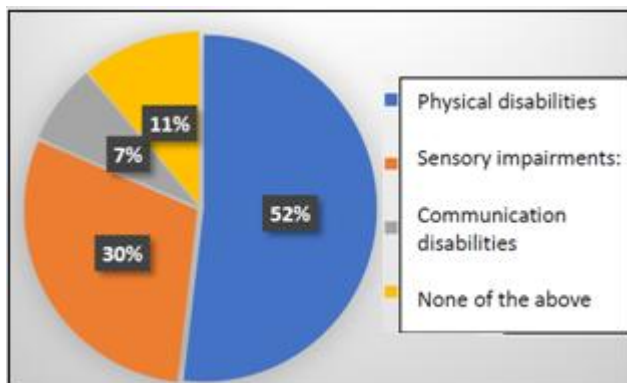


Figure 2: Percentage ratio according to the type of limitation of physical capabilities

78% percent of the respondents wish to have more space for free movement in the premises they live in. Also, a large percentage of the respondents, 83%, believe that the optimization of the existing space in their rooms can be achieved by changing the number, size and functionality of the existing furniture (fig.4).

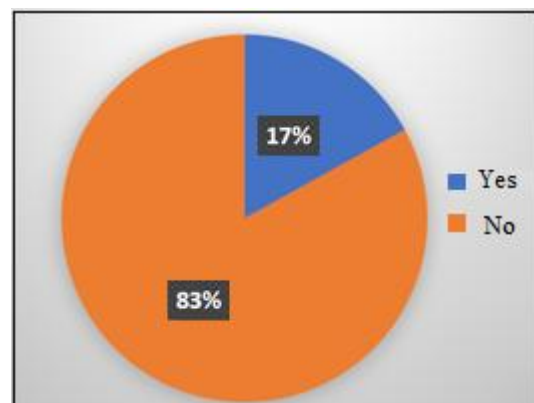


Figure 4: Need for space optimization

It is interesting to note the relatively small percentage of residents who are concerned with the color decisions in the architecture and design of the spaces they live in, namely 17% who express approval and 18% exactly on the opposite pole - they do not approve. When the respondents are asked whether the design of the furniture in their room is tailored to their needs, the answers become precise and clearly differentiated, unfortunately 67% answer with "NO" and only 10% with "YES" (fig.5).

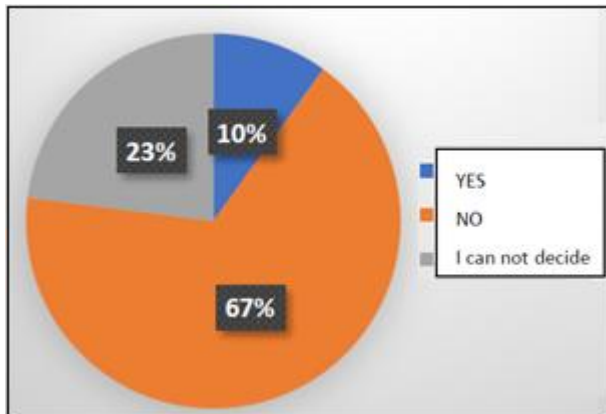


Figure 5: Degree of design compliance with user needs

Another question related to the functionality of the furniture, namely what is its most important function, again causes the respondents to give more than one answer. This time, the interesting thing to note is that each of the listed functions gets almost equal degree of importance and importance. Wood and easy - to - clean materials, with 38% and 33% respectively, are the most preferred materials for making furniture in living rooms. On the question of the safety of the furniture in the furnishings of the inhabited premises, a fairly balanced distribution of the opinion of the respondents is noticeable - 48% consider them safe and 44% respectively give the exact opposite opinion. After expressing an opinion about the functionality and safety of the furniture, the respondents were also asked about their comfort, with 52% defining them as uncomfortable and 43% as comfortable (fig.6).

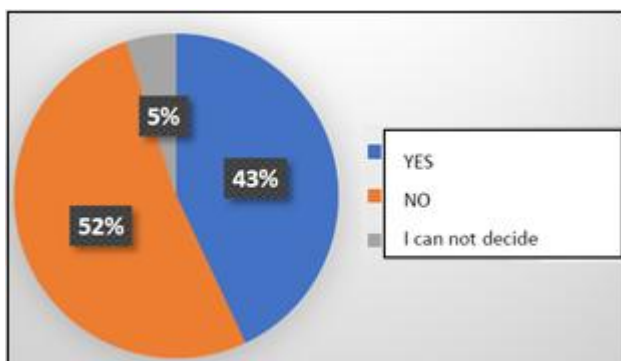


Figure 6: Percentage data on the comfort of furniture in rooms in nursing homes

In terms of the comfort theme, respondents are asked about the availability and accessibility of storage space for personal belongings and the ability to easily control the temperature and lighting in their room. The most important conclusion of the survey is that more than half of the respondents, namely 62%, would like their rooms to be

furnished with more high - tech, more functional and easier - to - manage furniture.

4. Results

The analysis of interior design and furniture status in Bulgarian retirement homes yielded critical insights. The data collected through surveys, site visits, and interviews provided a multifaceted perspective on the current state of these environments and their impact on the residents' lives.

A. Survey Findings

The survey results revealed that a significant proportion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of interior design and furniture in the retirement homes. They reported concerns related to the comfort, functionality, safety, and aesthetic appeal of their living spaces.

B. Observational Study

Site visits highlighted several notable issues. Many retirement homes displayed outdated and worn - out interior designs and furniture. These included unsuitable furniture for the elderly with mobility issues, poor lighting conditions, inadequate access to outdoor spaces, and a lack of individuality in living spaces.

C. Interviews

Key stakeholder interviews echoed the above concerns and shed light on the systemic reasons behind these issues. Many retirement home administrators cited budget constraints and a lack of awareness of elderly - friendly design principles as major obstacles.

However, it wasn't all negative. Some facilities demonstrated good practices in interior design and furniture selection, showing a conscious effort to create a comfortable, safe, and aesthetically pleasing environment for their residents. These homes featured furniture designed for the elderly, good use of color and lighting, accessible layouts, and personalized living spaces.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the interior design and furniture status in Bulgarian retirement homes reveals several critical concerns that warrant further attention. Primarily, the survey, observational study, and interviews consistently indicated dissatisfaction with the current state of interiors and furniture in many retirement homes. These findings align with broader discussions in the field of gerontology about the importance of the physical environment in promoting the well - being of older adults.

Comfort, safety, accessibility, and a pleasing aesthetic environment are not only elements of a dignified living situation, but they are also integral to promoting the health and well - being of the residents. Aging often comes with a range of physical and cognitive changes that require the built environment to be designed thoughtfully. The presence of outdated, non - ergonomic, and poorly maintained furniture and interiors in Bulgarian retirement homes is therefore concerning.

However, it is important to note that these challenges are not unique to Bulgaria. They reflect broader global trends, especially in countries where the aged care sector has traditionally been under-resourced. Nonetheless, these findings underscore the urgency of addressing these issues in the Bulgarian context, given the country's rapidly aging population.

6. Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of the Interior Design and Furniture Status in Bulgarian Retirement Homes presents a pressing need for improvements to better cater to the aging population's needs. With a considerable proportion of residents expressing dissatisfaction with their living conditions, it is clear that current standards are falling short of meeting the demands for comfort, safety, functionality, and aesthetics in these homes.

The study found numerous instances where outdated and unsuitable furniture, poor lighting, a lack of accessibility features, and an overall lack of attention to elderly-friendly design principles negatively affected residents' quality of life. The financial constraints faced by these facilities, along with a lack of awareness of best practices for designing for the elderly, emerged as key barriers to improvement.

However, the presence of some retirement homes demonstrating good practices provides hope and direction. By prioritizing resident-centered design principles and investing in appropriate furniture and design elements, they are ensuring a higher quality of life for their residents. These examples serve as a beacon for what is possible when the right resources, awareness, and efforts are put into creating a more conducive living environment for the elderly.

As Bulgaria grapples with its rapidly aging population, addressing these issues becomes increasingly urgent. The findings of this study serve as a clarion call for all stakeholders - policymakers, administrators, designers, and social entrepreneurs - to pay heed to the current state of retirement homes. It is an appeal for them to invest time, effort, and resources towards transforming these spaces into environments that truly support the well-being, dignity, and comfort of their elderly residents.

The study's findings make it clear that more research and proactive measures are needed to improve the current situation. This is a significant step towards realizing a future where all older adults in Bulgaria have access to a living environment that not only meets their needs but enhances their quality of life.

References

- [1] Creswell J., "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches" (1994);
- [2] WHO Regional Office for Europe, European Commission, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2021), COVID - 19 Health Systems Response Monitor – Bulgaria.

Author Profile



Eng. Maria Kichukova graduated with a master's degree, majoring in "Engineering Design (Interior and Furniture Design)", and is currently a PhD student at the Forestry University - Sofia. Since 2014 actively works in the field of innovation and implementation of new technologies in interior design, participates in conferences in the country and abroad with articles on the subject, and also mentors young teachers in the "Interior Design" department in Vocational school of design "Elisaveta Vazova" – Sofia.