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1 What is the role body sway deviation (BSD) and body sway velocity (BSV) play in postural
2 stability in older adults?

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7

Summary

1
2 This cross sectional study focused on how Postural Stability (PS) indicators: body sway
3 deviation (BSD) and body sway velocity (BSV), change with age and their association with
4 levels of social and physical activity. Observational study: 80 older adults (aged: 60-96) were
5 purposefully recruited from two sources: the University of the Third Age (TAU) (n=35) and a
6 residential care home (CH) (n=45). Differences in the indicators of PS, approximated through
7 Centre of Pressure (COP) measurements, were assessed by the Romberg Stance Test (Test A)
8 subsequently repeated on 10cm foam surface (Test B), using a Kistler® Dynamometric Platform.
9 The RCH Group was older, had higher BMI and was less socially and physically active, showed
10 more body sway in all indicators compared to TAU group. For all participants body sway
11 velocity (BSV) was significantly correlated with age. The strength of correlation of body sway
12 deviation (BSD) with age was also significant but not as strong. The findings indicate in line
13 with previous studies that deterioration in BSV is associated with poor PS more than
14 deterioration in BSD.

15

16 **Key words:** Body sway deviation (BSD); Body sway velocity (BSV); Postural stability (PS);
17 Ageing, Platform stabilometry; Centre of pressure (COP)

18

19

Introduction

Ageing is affected by many physiological and pathological variables such as genes, lifestyle, and chronic disease, which interact in multiple ways, influencing the manner in which aging occurs (1). Age-related deterioration in Postural stability (PS) is often reported as the major determinant of falls and fracture risk in older adult (2,3). Falls are a widespread cause of accidents and injury in the older adults, reported to impact hugely on health care costs (4). Unintentional injuries were reported to be the fifth leading cause of death where falls in older adults account for two thirds of these deaths (5). The majority of older adults who have fallen experienced psychological as well as physical harm (6). In community-living older people, the prevalence rates for fear of falling range from 20-85% (7), and from 15-55% is associated with avoidance of physical activity (7). When lacking physical activity older people are more likely to develop severe muscle atrophy, resulting often in Sarcopenia (8,9) and a progressive substitution of muscle fibres by connective tissues (10). This affects muscle strength, flexibility, coordination and may result in an overall deterioration of PS (11), highly increasing the overall risk of falling (12), hospitalization and many other (physical as well as psychological) complications (13).

Postural Stability (PS) was defined as an ability to maintain the body's Centre of Gravity (COG) or Centre of Mass (COM) over its Base of Support whether this base is stationary or moving (1,12,14-17). Control of body sway (BS) during quiet standing is achieved physiologically by using feedback and feed forward mechanisms when responding to perturbations of stability (18). Postural Stability involves two subsystems (19,20): the passive subsystem including the skeleton and ligaments and the active subsystem which is a dynamic process set by muscle co-contraction, both reported to be influenced by age-related processes (19,20).

1 In order to reduce falls and target an appropriate intervention, PS needs to be monitored.
2 Several types of measurement have been developed to approximate PS. Some are balance tests;
3 others are balance or BS measuring devices. A stabilometric platform is often used to measure
4 BS through Centre of Pressure (COP) recording which is further divided into several indicators.
5 These indicators include: Anterior/Posterior Body Sway Deviation (A/P BSD), Medial/Lateral
6 Body Sway Deviation (M/L BSD), Anterior/Posterior Body Sway Velocity (A/P BSV),
7 Medial/Lateral Body Sway Velocity (M/L BSV) and Total Body Sway Area (TBSA), are
8 considered as a reliable measure of BS (12,16,21,22).

9 There is general consensus that age-related changes play an important role in BS, reported
10 as greater in older people (over 60) than in younger adults (1,9,23,24)(23). Some authors were
11 focused on BS in both directions (A/P and M/L) and reported that A/P BS was up to 52 %
12 greater in those aged 70-80 years than in those aged 30-39 (25), and that Medial-Lateral (M/L)
13 BS control was most compromised in people at risk of falls (23). But little has been published on
14 Body Sway Deviation (BSD) and Body Sway Velocity (BSV) in relation to calendar age and the
15 extent to which they report on BS changes. For these reasons this observational study focuses on
16 static PS approximated by 5 BS indicators through platform stabilometry measurements in two
17 groups of older people, purposefully selected in relation to the level of self-reported adherence to
18 social and physical activities, measured by a questionnaire previously used and validated by
19 Tumova (26) in the Czech Republic, in two different tests of quiet standing. The aims were as
20 follows:

- 21 • To observe and compare the Postural stability (PS) - approximated by 5 Body sway (BS)
22 indicators - in two tests of quiet standing in two purposefully selected groups

1 (University of the Third Age group and Care Home group) of participants; in relation to
2 their adherence to social and physical activities

- 3 • To observe to what extent indicators of BS assess the PS measured on the Kistler's
4 platform and use correlations to compare Body Sway Velocity (BSV) and Body Sway
5 Deviation (BSD) relationship to calendar age

6 **Material and Methods**

7 **Participants**

8 Eighty older adults (age range 60-96) volunteered for this observational study and were
9 purposefully recruited through two different routes. One advertisement (Jan 2005 – Jan 2007)
10 was placed at Charles University and participants were recruited through the University of the
11 Third Age program, and the second advertisement (Jan 2001 – Jan 2005) was placed in
12 Residential Care Homes in Prague. These two groups were purposefully selected. Differences in
13 physical and social activities were anticipated already at the baseline. We aimed to get as
14 vigorous participants as we could and all the participants had to be able to accomplish the PS
15 testing without help. (see inclusion / exclusion criteria below).

16 - TAU group (**University of the Third Age**): n=27; 23 women, 6 men; $M_{age} 66,6 \pm 5,1$ years
17 (min=57,5/ max=75,8)

18 - RCH group (**Residential Care Home**): n=53; 42 women, 11 men; $M_{age} 82,9 \pm 6,1$ years
19 (min=71,6/ max=96)

20 Inclusion / exclusion criteria:

1 Participants from both groups were included in the study if: they were able to complete PS
2 testing (without help), gave informed consent and completed an administered questionnaire (see
3 below). Participants were excluded if: they were unable to complete PS testing and needed help
4 of another person, self-reported cerebrovascular, cardiac or neurological disease, were taking
5 regular medication (having known impact on dizziness) or taking more than 3 drugs (by which
6 way we tried to avoid heavy drug interactions), or have self-reported osteoporosis and/or
7 osteoarthritis and had BMI <23 or >33. Most of our participants were able to complete the
8 testing and if they were poly-morbid and reported some of the above mentioned conditions they
9 were also taking more than 3 drugs which excluded them from the sample in one or the other
10 way. We are also aware that the mean age of participants is not easily comparable but this has
11 been addressed to some extent in data analysis and it is also addressed in limitations of this
12 study.

13 **Materials and Procedure**

14 1. Social and physical activity levels and falls in previous years were assessed using a
15 questionnaire, standardized and validated by Tumova (26). Questionnaires were administered to
16 both groups and focused on previous and current levels of physical as well as social activity, self
17 reported falls in the past 4 years with reasons why these occurred, and medication used regularly
18 and occasionally. Participants were completing questionnaire individually. Answers to these
19 questionnaires were used to help to interpret results from simultaneous PS measurements and
20 identify participants who were less socially active and had lower levels of regular physical
21 activity.

22 2. Height and weight (from which BMI was calculated) were collected.

1 3. PS was measured on 3D dynamometric Kistler® Platform 9287B in all participants.
 2 Participants stood upright and barefoot on the platform. Participants were asked to stand on the
 3 force plate with their feet positioned comfortably and arms at their sides, head in normal
 4 forward-facing position and eyes focused on a stationary target located 1.5 m away at individual
 5 eye-height. Each participant performed a 30 second standing test with 60 second rest to minimize
 6 any effects due to fatigue (21). The tests of Quiet Standing used in present study were as follows:

7 **Test A** - Double Narrow Stance Eyes Open (**DNSEO**) known as well as parallel narrow
 8 or Romberg stance EO (15,16,22). **Test B** - Double Narrow Stance Eyes Open (**DNSEO**)
 9 identical with Test A but performed on 10 thick foam plastic support. Typical for this type of
 10 stance is that proprioception is limited. This type of test is considered more difficult when
 11 compared to Test A (26,27). In each test the following indicators were measured:

Indicators	Values
Medial/Lateral Body Sway deviations (M/L BSD)	[mm]
Anterior/Posterior Body Sway deviations (A/P BSD)	[mm]
Medial/Lateral Body Sway velocity (M/L BSV)	[mm/sec]
Anterior/Posterior Body Sway velocity (A/P BSV)	[mm/sec]
Total Body Sway Area (TBSA)	[mm ²]

12

13 **Data analysis**

14 Coordinates collected through the Kistler® platform measurement were entered into
 15 program software created for the Kistler® Platform by Boswart (28). From the recorded Centre
 16 of Pressure (COP) trajectory were computed values in Anterior/Posterior direction (A/P) and

1 Medial/Lateral direction (M/L) for Body Sway Deviations (BSD) and Body Sway Velocity
2 (BSV). The Total Body Sway Area (TBSA) was also computed. All statistical tests were
3 performed using SPSS 15. Descriptive statistics were used to report on mean, SD and median
4 values of BS indicators, age, height, weight, BMI, daily physical activity (PA), dizziness, falls
5 and social activity.

6 Data collected in terms of BSD and TBSA were considered as parametric; to assess the
7 relation with age of these indicators and to compare means between the two groups for A/P BSD,
8 M/L BSD and TBSA. Pearson's correlation coefficient and Independent Sample t-test were used.

9 Data collected in terms of BSV was treated as nonparametric data. Therefore to assess the
10 relation with age of A/P BSV, M/L BSV Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used and to
11 compare the two different groups, Mann-Whitney test was used.

12 To report on differences in TBSA, Ray charts (29) were used. Groups were adjusted for
13 age and only (N=14) participants from each group - aged between 70 and 76 years - were
14 selected for this analysis so that the differences observed can be attributed to differences in
15 lifestyle rather than age itself. Mean values for TBSA were recalculated in terms of mean
16 coordinates and projected onto X and Y axis for both M/L and A/P directions for both tests of
17 quiet standing A&B.

18 As indicators were divided into two groups parametric (BSD) and nonparametric (BSV),
19 Scatter plots and correlations (Pearson's and Spearman's) were used to assess the relationship
20 with calendar age (N=80). Finally to show changes in BSV with increasing age (N=80), a line
21 chart was used and for better clarity, participants were divided into 7 age groups.

22

Ethics

1 All participants signed an informed consent form and this study obtained Ethical
2 Approval.

3

Results

The Group from the Care Home was in average older, had higher BMI and showed higher BS values in all indicators of PS compared to the University of the Third Age group (Table I). Table I. also shows differences in the level of self reported regular physical activity per day and experienced falls or episodes of dizziness. All participants in Care Home group had experienced at least 1 fall in the last five years. For the majority of these participants experienced more than 1 fall, and also felt dizzy more often than the University of the Third Age group. Time spent in social activity differed between the two groups. Participants in the Care Home group spent on average 45.4 min/week in a social activity whereas participants in Third Age University group have spent 86.3 min in a social activity per week.

The Independent Sample t-test confirmed statistically significant inter-group differences for BSD between the University of the Third Age group and the Care Home group A/P BSD ($p < 0.01$); M/L BSD ($p < 0.01$) for both tests of quiet standing (A&B). The Mann-Whitney test confirmed statistically significant differences for BSV between the University of the Third Age group and the Care Home group A/P BSV ($p < 0.01$); M/L BSV ($p < 0.01$) in both tests of quiet standing (A&B).

Ray Charts (Fig. I.) show graphically differences in Total Body Sway Area (TBSA) when adjusted for the age difference between the two groups. The Care Home group had much larger TBSA in both Test A and Test B compared with the University of the Third Age group. For Test A mean values for the University of the Third Age group were: M/L direction 21.26 [mm^2], A/P direction 21.67 [mm^2]; mean values for the Care Home group were: M/L direction 20.91 [mm^2], A/P direction 24.58 [mm^2]. For Test B differences in TBSA were much larger: A/P direction

1 28.3 [mm²] for the University of the Third Age group and 30.8 [mm²] for the Care Home group;
2 and M/L direction 26.63 [mm²] for the University of the Third Age group and 31.55 [mm²] for
3 the Care Home group.

4 Scatter plots and correlation coefficients show a stronger relationship for BSV ($r^2=0.47$)
5 with calendar age than for BSD ($r^2=0.27$) with calendar age; Fig 2&3. Table II. shows the
6 strength of the relationship with calendar age for BSD and BSV. The strongest correlation was
7 found for A/P BSV 0.727 ($p<0.001$) in Test A, the weakest correlation was then found for M/L
8 BSD 0.433 ($p<0.001$) in Test A as well.

9 The line charts further show how changes in BSV progress with increasing calendar age
10 for tests A&B (Fig IV.; Table II.). The correlation coefficients (Table II.) show how BSV
11 increases with age in all participants. The BS velocity increases from 10.7 [m/s] in the youngest
12 group (60-64) to 19.2 [m/s] in the oldest group over 90. Fig 4. shows that until the age of 80 BS
13 velocity increases progressively although not steeply (confirmed by results in both tests A&B,
14 for M/L BSV as well as for A/P BSV). From 80 onwards the BS velocity starts to increase, more
15 markedly in Test B in both M/L BSV and A/P BSV. We have also noted that A/P BSV increases
16 more than M/L BSV in test A whereas both directions of BSV seem to increase equally for test B
17 (Fig.III.).

18 **Discussion:**

19 The aim was to observe and compare the Postural stability (PS), approximated by five
20 Body Sway (BS) indicators, in two tests of quiet standing in two purposefully selected groups of
21 volunteers, in relation to their adherence to social and physical activities. We had initially aimed
22 to have both groups of a similar age but unfortunately the Care Home group of participants was

1 at the baseline older. This made the comparison slightly difficult but for the Ray Charts this fact
2 was accounted for and the two groups compared contained the same number of participants
3 (N=14) who were within the same age range (70-76). This might imply that the difference our
4 results show is associated with the different levels of physical and social activities. In this aspect
5 our findings supports the findings of other authors (12,15,16,30) suggesting that PS worsens with
6 increasing age and is associated with reduced amounts of physical and social activity.

7 However, our findings regarding the direction of BS are in contrast to Makki and
8 Holliday's (23). They reported that Medial-Lateral (M/L) BS control was the most compromised
9 in older people at risk of falls, and suggested M/L BS as the best indicator to predict future risk
10 of falls. Our findings from the Ray charts indicate that in the Test A (easier test – where
11 proprioception is not specifically challenged) the Residential Care Home Group (RCH) has
12 shown worse results in body sway in A/P direction in comparison to the University of the Third
13 Age group (TAU) rather than in M/L direction as previously suggested by Makki and Holliday.

14 The importance of A/P body sway was also observed by Lucy et al. (25). They have
15 reported higher body sway in A/P direction in older adults. A possible explanation for the
16 difference between A/P and M/L postural control due to the nature of bipedal standing, thus
17 affording naturally better stability in M/L direction was suggested by Kang et al. (31). This
18 could explain why the body sway in the A/P direction might be more easily compromised but
19 further research is required to the mechanisms and differences in control of A/P and M/L body
20 sway.

21 When comparing the relationship of Body sway velocity (BSV) and Body sway
22 deviations (BSD) with calendar age, our results confirmed stronger relationship for BSV then for

1 BSD. This finding is supported by Morasso and Schieppati (32) and Masani et al. (33) who
2 suggested that actual postural control systems relies notably on velocity information. Masani et
3 al. (33) further reported that the postural control systems during quiet stance might adopt a
4 control strategy relying significantly on BS velocity information, and modulating the muscle
5 activity in an anticipatory manner. Prieto et al. (34) reported the velocity of centre of pressure
6 (COP) displacement as the only measure that identified age-related changes. All this leads us to
7 support the idea that worsening of PS with ageing happens due to increasing BS velocity, which
8 is, most probably, reflecting age-related decline in the neural processing. This idea was
9 previously implied by Massion et al. (35) and Wilders et al. (36). They reported that BS velocity
10 is affected by slow muscle activation times, which further affect the feedback and feed forward
11 mechanisms and decrease the overall PS. High levels of muscle activity were described as a
12 characteristic of age-related decline in PS, previously reported by Makki et al. (23). However,
13 neither of them were clear whether such increase in muscle activity would preclude greater
14 postural instability or increased muscle activity as a compensatory response.

15 Melzer et al. (37) suggested that a challenge to PS brings about an increased stiffness
16 achieved through co-contraction of leg muscles as the compensatory response, supposedly
17 decreasing the sway amplitude. In contrast Kang et al. (31) reported an increase in sway
18 amplitude, together with increased muscular co-contraction, especially when performing dual
19 tasks. Kang et al. (31) further suggested that increased co-contractions slow and hamper the
20 ability to generate the corrective reactions to environmental perturbations (slips and trips)
21 leading to falls. This could worsen with a feeling of insecurity and/or post fall anxiety, known to
22 affect especially older fallers (38). The feeling of insecurity could increase muscle activity,
23 reported by Kang et al. (31) as co-contraction and worsen already slowed postural reaction to

1 perturbations, having an overall destabilizing effect for which the body systems cannot (due to
2 age-related changes) compensate. For all the above reasons we support the idea that BSV
3 increases, reported also in our findings, represent a substantial danger to the overall postural
4 stability and that BS velocity, once extracted from platform stabilometry measurements, and
5 might further serve as an indicator of progressive age-related changes in physical functioning.

6 This further leads us to reflect on how to account for BSV age-related changes when
7 designing a corrective therapy. From the literature we know that corrective therapy usually
8 focuses on BSD by encouraging yoga, Pilates, muscle strengthening and more recently balance
9 training (24); and the focus on BSD might be the reason why such corrective therapies were not
10 evaluated as very effective. Based on our results we would suggest evaluations targeting rather
11 BSV when measuring effects of intervention / exercise.

12 Due to age-related changes in BSV, reflecting to a greater extent changes in nerve
13 conduction velocity and accuracy, as discussed above, we may need a different exercise. Several
14 authors (Vojta, Vele) have suggested this exercise focusing more on joint flexibility and muscle
15 synergies, while stimulating inborn locomotor patterns (39,40). These were described by Vojta,
16 Vele, Panjabi (39-41) and linked with correct breathing patterns (39). Such exercising could have
17 rather a 'stimulating and reassuring' effect that might help to compensate for stiffness induced
18 co-contractions and support the ability to generate corrective reactions to environmental
19 perturbations, especially in fallers. Interventions targeting joint flexibility and muscle
20 strengthening were recently introduced by Mazzeo et al. (42), but without encouraging findings,
21 Mazzeo (42) focused on root joints only. When spine flexibility and strengthening exercising
22 were added, Danneels et al. (43) and Hides et al. (44), combining stabilization training together
23 with dynamic static resistance, reported more encouraging findings. In addition better spine

1 flexibility was found to improve functional reach, decrease functional limitations and improve
2 balance control in the elderly (24,45-47). To demonstrate better these mechanisms further
3 research is needed.

4 Finally we have also noted that BS velocity starts to change more steeply around the age
5 of 80 (Fig 4. Line chart). Our results have shown this trend in both tests of quiet standing.
6 Results from more difficult tests show an even steeper increase in BS velocity from age of 80
7 onwards. However further research is also needed to find more general patterns.

8 **Limitations of the study**

9 Participants and Care Homes were not randomly chosen this might be a limiting factor in
10 terms of the generalizability of our results. Also we would like to add that in this study we were
11 comparing older adults with different levels of physical activity. We have tried to make both
12 samples comparable as to their function, mobility and ability to complete the testing without help
13 (see inclusion and exclusion criteria) but we are aware that there are still few limitations that
14 need addressing. One limitation arises from different mean age of the groups. On one hand this
15 has been addressed in methods in participants section (inclusion and exclusion criteria) and data
16 analysis section (where for Ray Charts we have adjusted for age so both samples are in the same
17 age range). On the other hand as one of the aims of this observational study was looking onto
18 how PS indicators (BSV and BSD) change with increasing age we think that differences in mean
19 age between the groups might not be that limiting after all. Another limitation might be that even
20 if we reduced the number of drugs being taken by 3, there still may be some drug interactions we
21 are not aware of which of course is, to some extent, limiting results of this study. On the other

1 hand there were few authors in the past (i.e. Stelmach) that argued for less tight exclusion criteria
2 as it might be altering the picture of the elderly population.

3 Another limitation might be that platform stabilometry as a method is not very sensitive
4 to changes in motivation, moods or emotions, as these are difficult to assess in real time
5 measurement. Also questionnaires assessing falls, dizziness, levels of PA and social activity in
6 this study were used only to interpret results. Further research would be focused on using more
7 precisely coded levels of social and physical activity and on exercising involving spine
8 flexibility.

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13 University Internal Grant Agency in 2006 and Charles University Internal Grant Agency in 2007.

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17 **Conclusions**

18 Postural stability (PS) has been assessed using five various indicators in two different
19 groups of volunteers (a Third Age University group and a Residential Care Home group). Levels
20 of usual physical and social activities were also assessed in all participants. PS in the Residential
21 Care Home group was significantly worse than the results of the Third Age University group.

1 This difference, we suggest, can be attributed not only to age-related changes but also to reduced
2 physical and social activity in the Care Home group. This study has shown that it is beneficial to
3 divide PS indicators into BS deviation and BS velocity and observe age-related changes affecting
4 BS Deviation (BSD) and BS Velocity (BSV) in different ways. Our results indicate that the age-
5 dependent indicator is BSV rather than BSD, and that BSV contributes to overall PS more than
6 BSD, which is in agreement with previous studies. Therefore we suggest that BSV needs to be
7 accounted for when designing the physical activity to prevent falls in the elderly.

8

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