

A Look at Leisure

LEISURE ATTITUDES

This is the eighth bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks that looks at the leisure of Albertans. The series is designed to describe the responses from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. This bulletin will focus on attitudes about leisure, and views about the importance of various personal, community and activity items. The results should provide further understanding about the role of recreation, and should be of particular interest to those concerned with leisure education and counselling.



"Recreation makes me feel good."



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INTRODUCTION TO LEISURE ATTITUDES

The topic of leisure attitudes is becoming more important to practitioners working in recreation settings. Since client satisfaction is the goal of leisure and recreation services, it is important to understand the psychological responses and views of the public. In addition, it is important to realize that there are a variety of opinions and feelings about recreation issues.

Attitudes may be considered a learned tendency to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given subject. Attitudes are feelings, and may contribute to an intention to act, and subsequently to an actual behaviour. Since attitudes may be linked to behaviours, the study of leisure attitudes may help recreation practitioners to understand the leisure choices and leisure behaviours of their clients.

Several of the statements discussed in this bulletin are part of a Leisure Ethic Scale which was developed by Crandall and Slivken (1978) to measure leisure attitudes. Crandall (1979) suggests that knowledge of attitudes is important for three reasons:

- 1) To measure trends in society, such as the relative importance of leisure and work;
- 2) To improve service delivery; and
- 3) As a basis for leisure education and counselling, directed to helping people clarify and improve their attitudes about leisure.

Little is known about how leisure attitudes are formed. Crandall (1979) notes that they are probably established early in life and may change gradually as a result of information and experiences obtained in adulthood. For example, it is possible that unfavourable feelings about leisure may be related to the influence of the Protestant work ethic, learned in adolescence or early adult years. As a result, a person may not be able to appreciate the value of leisure in later life (Iso-Ahola, 1980:163).

The literature suggests that general attitudes toward leisure have been undergoing a change in recent years (Iso-Ahola and Buttimer, 1981). It appears that in our society, leisure has become increasingly important relative to work, and is a major source of life-satisfaction and a sense of well-being for most people.



The first section of the bulletin will provide a general introduction to leisure attitudes. The second section reports the survey findings on leisure attitudes, and will note the characteristics of people who have different views about leisure and recreation. The third section will look at the importance of various personal, community and recreation activity items. Responses to these items are examined to see if they vary with certain characteristics of the survey respondents. The final section will discuss possible implications of the findings for recreation practitioners.

Some of the major findings of the survey are:

- o The majority of people view recreation as a positive experience.
- o People who express negative views about recreation are likely to be over 45 years of age and to have lower education and income levels.
- o The importance of personal, community, and leisure activity items varies most strongly with the age of the respondent.

In interpreting the results of the study, there is an important point to consider. The topic of leisure attitudes is a fairly new field for researchers. The types of questions asked in our survey look at some very basic opinions about leisure. The responses are difficult to interpret because we have no information about the frame of mind of the respondents when they answered the questions. A better understanding of leisure attitudes can only be gained through a more detailed type of study. This bulletin, therefore, simply introduces the concept of leisure attitudes and its importance in the provision of leisure services.



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ATTITUDES ABOUT LEISURE

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with seven attitude statements about leisure and recreation. Both favourable and unfavourable opinions were assessed.

The results of Question Four indicate that most people have positive opinions about leisure and its benefits (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: ATTITUDES TOWARD LEISURE AND RECREATION

	Agree	Disagree
Recreation makes me feel good	98.4	1.6
One should feel a sense of pride in one's recreational activities	93.4	6.6
People should seek as much recreation as possible in their lives	84.7	15.3
I like to do things on the spur of the moment	69.7	30.3
Most people spend too much time enjoying themselves today	16.3	83.7
The thought of having more free time when I retire scares me	11.4	88.6
It is bad for adults to be playful	5.3	94.7

Almost everyone (98.4% of respondents) agreed that "recreation makes me feel good", and that "one should feel a sense of pride in one's recreational activities" (93.4% of respondents). The majority (84.7%) also felt that "people should seek as much recreation as possible in their lives". This picture indicates a clear recognition by the respondents of the personal benefits of recreation.

Over two-thirds (69.7%) of respondents agreed that they liked "to do things on the spur of the moment". This was particularly true for females, and for younger adults (under 35 years of age). Spontaneity was important for people with no children and decreased with the number of school-age children in the household.



The majority of respondents disagreed with the statements that "most people spend too much time enjoying themselves" (83.7% of respondents), that "it's bad for adults to be playful" (94.7% of respondents) and that "having more free time when I retire scares me" (88.6% of respondents). Only a small proportion of the respondents agreed with these three negatively worded statements. These people were more likely to be in the older age groups (over 45 years) and to have lower education and income levels. When household type was considered, it was found that couples with no children, and those from single-parent families were more likely than other groups to agree with these statements. Many were farmers or retired workers, and had lived in their present residence for a relatively long period of time.

Overall, survey results indicate that positive views about leisure are widely held. A very small proportion of people may not feel positively about leisure, or may be fearful of the additional leisure time that accompanies retirement.

QUALITY OF LIFE ITEMS

Previous research (Flanagan, 1978) suggests that many factors may contribute to a person's perceived quality of life and life satisfaction. Fifteen items were included in the 1981 survey to represent a few of the many factors which are seen as contributing to improved quality of life. Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of these personal, community, and leisure activity items to themselves.

Overall, personal items appeared to be important to the greatest proportion of people (see Table 2). These items included "a challenging job" and "things you do with your family", which were considered very or extremely important by three quarters of the respondents. "Going on vacation" was also important for at least two-thirds of those answering the survey.

Community items were also high in importance, although not quite as important as personal items. Included in this category were: "the neighbourhood you live in" (55.5% of respondents), "living close to recreational facilities (42.6%), and "having church groups, service groups and community groups in your community" (31.6% of respondents).



TABLE 2: PERSONAL, COMMUNITY AND LEISURE ACTIVITY ITEMS IMPORTANT TO RESPONDENTS

	<u>% of Respondents</u>
1 A challenging job	74.8
2. Things you do with your family	74.0
3. Going on vacation	69.4
4. The neighbourhood you live in 2	55.5
5. Reading for pleasure	54.4
6. Living close to recreational facilities	42.6
7. Participating in hobbies or crafts	33.8
3. Participating in sports 3	38.5
9. Having church groups, service groups, and community groups in your community	31.6
10 Watching T.V.	31.0
11 Entertainment such as restaurants, movies, etc. 3	30.5
12 Being a spectator of sports activities 3	25.4
13 Visiting museums, art galleries, libraries, theatres 3	23.2
14 Participating in creative arts such as music, drama and art 3	16.8
15 Entertainment such as lounges, bars, etc. 3	13.3

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- 1. Personal items
 - 2. community items
 - 3. Leisure activity items

The specific leisure activities examined in this survey did not appear to be as important as the personal and community items. Of the leisure activities, "reading for pleasure" was ranked highest, with over one-half of respondents (54.4%) considering this activity to be important. "Participating in hobbies or crafts" and "participating in sports" were important to 38% of respondents. The remaining activities were important to fewer than one-third of those answering the survey.



The relative ranking of personal, community, and leisure items shown in our study is similar to the pattern reported by Flanagan (1978). Personal items such as physical and material well-being, understanding oneself, relations with other people, and interesting, rewarding work were considered important by the majority of people in his study. Recreational activities were important to a smaller proportion of people. However, Flanagan found that active recreation (such as sports, travelling, playing an instrument, dancing) was fairly strongly related to quality of life. When active recreation needs were met, people were more likely to consider their quality of life as being good.

How does the importance of these personal and community items and leisure activities vary for different types of people? Such information may help to explain why people make certain choices and attach priorities to certain aspects of their lives.

The study results indicate that the importance of these items varies most strongly with the age of the respondent. Other particularly influential factors included occupation, education, and household structure. Some examples are presented here to illustrate the types of patterns which were found.

Age had a definite influence on the degree to which respondents attached importance to various personal, community and leisure items. "A challenging job" and "living close to recreational facilities" declined in importance with age. In contrast, the presence of "church, service and community groups" became more important as age increased.

Certain items were particularly important for young adults (under 34 years of age). These included social entertainment such as lounges, movies, restaurants, and participating in sports and creative arts. "A challenging job" was also important to this group. Younger people (under 25 years) also felt that "living close to recreational facilities" was important.

Three factors of particular importance for people in the mid-adult age range (35 to 44 years) were "things you do with your family", "going on vacation", and "the neighbourhood you live in". Visiting museums, art galleries and libraries was more important to this age group than those in other age groups. Passive leisure activities, such as reading and watching T.V. were more significant for older people (over 45 years of age).

Other characteristics of respondents were also related to particular items in the survey. Some items which are most relevant to the recreation practitioner are presented here as examples. "Things you do with your family" was more likely to be important to people in the mid-adult years (35 to 44) who were married with children, and rural residents rather than town or city dwellers. "Living close to recreational facilities" appeared to be particularly important to people under 25 years of age as well as to households with children, single-parent families, and residents of attached houses.

IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of these findings for the recreation practitioner? The survey results suggest that most people have positive views about leisure and recreation. This provides an indication of the degree of public interest in recreation and leisure opportunities. Thus there is some evidence of a large potential clientele for recreation services in the community. It is the challenge of the recreation practitioner to provide a range of suitable programs to meet the needs of residents and attract a greater proportion of this clientele into active participation. To do this, practitioners should understand reasons for non-participation such as unfavourable attitudes and perceived obstacles which might limit participation (see "A Look at Leisure" No. 5: Barriers to Participation.)

As found in other studies, a small portion of the respondents have differing or unfavorable opinions about leisure and recreation. This minority includes some older respondents, and those with lower education and income levels. Does this pattern hold true for your community? What can you do to help these people improve their leisure enjoyment? Many people have some guilt about "doing nothing" (Crandall, 1979). Structured leisure activity such as volunteer work might be acceptable and enjoyable to these people. Can you think of other ways you can encourage their participation?

Some respondents also indicated that they were afraid of retirement. Are you aware of any pre-retirement counselling opportunities in your region? Could you encourage courses or workshops in your community focusing on leisure and retirement?



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Leisure education and counselling are relatively new and specialized techniques for the recreation practitioner. These approaches attempt to expose people to potential leisure activities, and to opportunities for learning new skills. Leisure counselling helps people to determine their recreation and leisure preferences and to find out ways of reducing obstacles to their participation in these activities and pastimes. The goal of leisure counselling is to increase people's awareness of leisure opportunities and to increase leisure enjoyment. Do you see a need for this type of service in your community? Have you considered further training to develop leisure counselling skills?

The survey results suggest that certain personal, community, and leisure activity items vary in importance for different people at different ages. Do you try to consider these variations in your recreation programming? Do your programs appeal to a broad range of lifestyles and age groups? Many factors may be varied to meet these diverse needs. For example, such features as the types of programs, the degree of supervision, group size and instructional methods may need to be adjusted for particular age levels. Certain age groups might need more information or more support and encouragement before participating.

The benefits of recreation and leisure services are increased if these services are used by many segments of society. The information reported in this bulletin alerts recreation practitioners to the variety of lifestyles and views which may exist in their communities. Awareness of these different "publics" is important to recreation practitioners concerned with broad community involvement and with satisfying the diverse needs of their recreation clientele.



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FUTURE ISSUES

Social Settings - What social settings are important in recreation?

INFORMATION

If you require further information or would like to change your mailing address please contact:

G. Burn Evans
Research Coordinator, Planning Support Branch
Recreation Development Division
Alberta Recreation and Parks
8th Floor, Standard Life Centre
10405 - Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3N4
Telephone: 427-6775



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