

A Look at Leisure

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AGE AND RECREATION PATTERNS

In this bulletin, findings from the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* are presented to show how recreation activity patterns, reasons for participation, and barriers to participation vary with age.



Alberta

RECREATION AND PARKS
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INTRODUCTION

The topic of age and recreation participation is attracting more interest, as we try to predict how the changing age structure of society will shape recreation patterns in the future.

By comparing the recreation patterns of various age groups, researchers are able to see how recreation behaviours vary across the lifespan. In addition, researchers are beginning to take an in-depth look at recreation behaviours associated with specific stages of life, such as the mid-adult and senior years (e.g. Kelly et al, 1987; Warnick, 1987).

Although a person's age is important, it should be remembered that age is just one of the factors which helps to explain recreation participation patterns. Personality, social influences, early life recreation experiences, and leisure attitudes also shape recreation behaviour throughout the lifetime.

In Alberta, the proportion of adults 50 years of age or over is expected to increase from 20% to 25% by the year 2000. The youngest age group (under 20 years) is expected to decrease in proportion from 31% to 28%. A decrease is also predicted for the 20 to 49 year age group, from 49% to 47% of the Alberta population. (Alberta Bureau of Statistics, 1988).

The survey findings summarized in this bulletin should assist practitioners in developing their planning and programing directions to meet the population changes of the 1990s.

Some of the highlights discussed in the bulletin are:

- Activities with the highest participation levels are quite similar across the lifespan, although participation rates do vary with age.
- Participation in most activities declines with age, although less strenuous activities have more stable participation.
- Reasons for participation and barriers to participation vary noticeably for different age groups.
- Desired activities and barriers to participation have been very stable during the 1980s.

AGE GROUPS IN THE SURVEY

In order to look at age-related patterns, respondents who answered the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* were divided into five age groups. Table 1 lists the categories and the number of survey respondents in each group. The table also shows how the total survey sample was divided among the five age categories.



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Table 1: Size of Group in the Survey

	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Total Samples
Under 25 years	333	8%
25 to 34 years	1197	30%
35 to 49 years	1189	30%
50 to 64 years	714	18%
65 years or over	549	14%

TOP 10 ACTIVITIES

When we looked at participation in 65 different activities, we found that the top ten activities were quite similar for each age group. The most frequently reported activities for each age category are shown in Table 2. The percentage figures indicate the proportion of people in the age category who participated in the activity (i.e., participation rate). For example, 89% of all respondents in the "Under 25 years" age group participated in walking for pleasure in the previous year. Within each age group, the activities are listed in descending order of importance, based on participation rates.

Although the top ten activities are quite consistent across age categories, the participation rates and the relative importance (ranking) of these activities do vary. For example, the activity "Attending sports events as a spectator" shows the following age variations:

Attending Sports Events	Participation Rate	Rank
Under 25 years	69.66	64
25 to 34 years	52.38	33
35 to 49 years		56
50 to 64 years		
65 years or over		

PARTICIPATION PATTERN

For most of the activities in the survey, participation declines with age. This is a typical finding, especially for more strenuous pursuits. Figure 1.1 shows this pattern using swimming as an example. The recent Campbell's Survey on Well-Being in Canada also found an age-based decline in participation (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1989).

However, this does not occur with all activities. Some activities have more stable participation throughout life, with a slight decline over the age of 65 years (see Figure 1.2). Examples of these activities include: walking; driving for pleasure; fishing and hunting; cross-country skiing; curling; as well as crafts and hobbies. Participation in gardening actually increases up to 65



Table 2: Top Ten Activities for Each Age Group

<i>UNDER 25 YEARS</i>	<i>PERCENT</i>	<i>50 TO 64 YEARS</i>	<i>PERCENT</i>
Walking for pleasure	89	Walking for pleasure	83
Driving for pleasure	78	Gardening	75
Attending sports events as spectator	69	Driving for pleasure	74
Bicycling	67	Visiting a museum, live theatre, gallery	60
Swimming (in pools)	64	Crafts/hobbies	57
Dancing	62	Attending sports events as spectator	52
Crafts/hobbies Visiting a museum, live theatre, gallery	58	Picnicking in the countryside	50
Overnight camping	58	Dancing	39
Educational courses	54	Bicycling	38
		Fishing	36
25 TO 34 YEARS		65 YEARS OR OVER	
Walking for pleasure	8	Walking for pleasure	78
Driving for pleasure	9	Driving for pleasure	67
Attending sports events as spectator	80	Gardening	65
Crafts/hobbies	66	Visiting a museum, live theatre, gallery	55
Bicycling	63	Crafts/hobbies	49
Swimming (in pools)	63	Attending sports events as spectator	38
Visiting a museum, live theatre, gallery	60	Picnicking in the countryside	38
Overnight camping	59	Fishing	29
Gardening Picnicking in the countryside	57	Dancing	26
	55	Swimming (in pools)	24
	52		
35 TO 49 YEARS			
Walking for pleasure			
Driving for pleasure	86		
Gardening Visiting a museum, live theatre, gallery	77		
Attending sports events as spectator	67		
Crafts/hobbies	6		
Picnicking in the countryside	4		
Bicycling	59		
Overnight camping	58		
Swimming (in pools)	57		
	51		
	51		



years of age. Social interaction and some home-based activities tend to have relatively high participation rates throughout life (Kelly *et al*, 1987).

For some activities/ participation peaks in the mid-adult years, and then gradually declines (see Figure 1.3). In addition to visiting museums and galleries, these activities include picnicking, golf, hiking, and sailing. Participating as a volunteer shows the same trend.

For some activities, declining participation rates for older adults may be somewhat offset by a higher frequency of participation among those who do participate. This is likely due to more free time associated with retirement or semi-retirement. For example, volunteerism data from the 1988 *General Recreation Survey* show that older volunteers contribute more hours per week than younger volunteers (Dunn, 1989). More frequent golf activity has also been observed among mature adult golfers compared to younger golfers (see Warnick, 1987).

Other aspects of recreation behaviour change with age. The Campbell's Survey found that the home becomes more important as a location for physical activity as age increases. Also, older adults are more likely to exercise alone. Close to one-half of adults 45 years of age or over reported participating in physical activity alone.

In terms of trends, the Campbell's Survey found that the proportion of active Canadians increased from 1981 to 1988, for all age groups: 10 to 24 years; 25 to 44 years; and 45 years of age or over.

Figure 1.1: Swimming

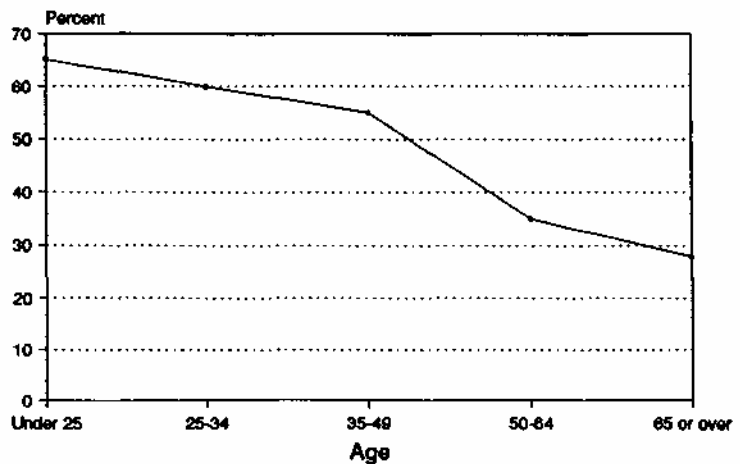


Figure 1.2: Crafts and Hobbies

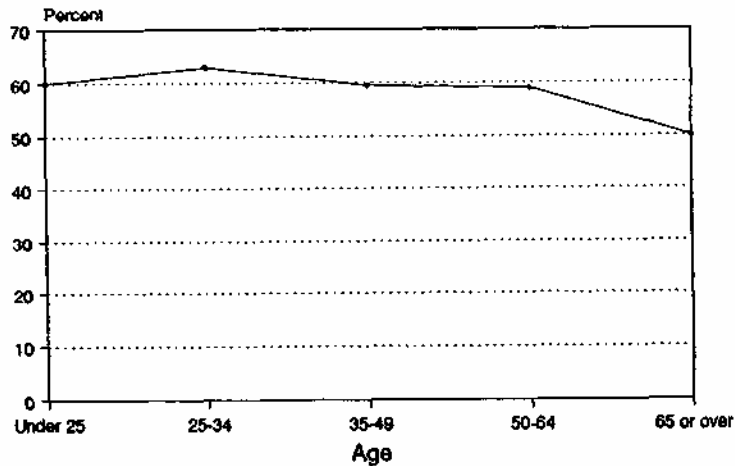
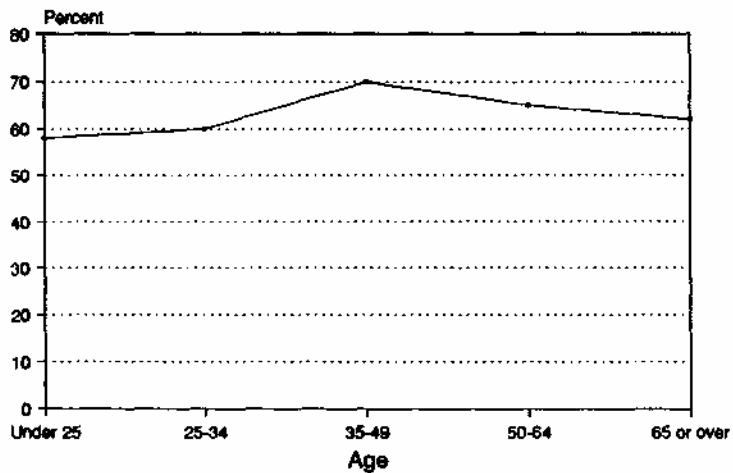


Figure 1.3: Visiting Museums, Galleries



There are many factors that contribute to these age patterns. Activities differ in the strength and specialized skills they require. The types of activities that contribute to a feeling of well-being differ with age (Kelly *et al*, 1987). People must continually adapt to biological, psychological, and social changes throughout the lifespan (Osgood, 1987). Lifecycle patterns such as work demands, social roles, marital status, the presence of children, and departure of children from the home shape recreation choices. People may place different priorities on personal, community, and leisure factors at different stages



of life. Attitudes toward leisure, and access to recreation opportunities may vary for people of different ages.

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

The survey also asked respondents to identify their favorite activities. For this analysis, we looked at the favorite activities of males and females in each age category, as these were quite different. Table 3 lists the five favorite activities for each group.

Table 3: Favorite Activities

Group: Males and Females

	Males	Females
Under 25 years:	Ice hockey Fishing Bodybuilding Golf Volleyball	Walking Bicycling Swimming Camping Horseback riding
25 to 34 years:	Ice hockey Golf Camping Fishing Hunting	Walking Camping Fitness/aerobics Swimming Bicycling
35 to 49 years:	Camping Golf Fishing Hunting Walking	Walking Camping Swimming Reading Bicycling
50 to 64 years:	Camping Golf Fishing Walking Curling	Walking Golf Camping Handicrafts Reading
65 years or over:	Fishing Golf Walking Camping Gardening	Walking Handicrafts Reading Golf Board Games Gardening Dancing

WHY DO PEOPLE PARTICIPATE?

The most important reasons for participating in recreation activities are the same for all age groups. These include:

- Pleasure
- Relaxation



- Physical health and exercise.

In addition, doing something different from work is important for all age groups except those over 65 years.

Looking at the full range of reasons for participation included in the 1988 *General Recreation Survey*, we found several age-related patterns:

Reasons which decline in importance with age:

- Improving skills or knowledge
- Learning new skills and abilities
- To be alone
- To be away from my family
- To compete
- For a challenge
- For excitement.

Reasons which increase in importance with age:

- To help the Community
- To enjoy nature
- Relaxation.

Reasons which are particularly important to young adults and older adults but of less importance in the mid-adult years:

- To show others I can do it
- To keep busy
- To be creative
- To do things with friends
- To meet new people
- Because I am good at it.

For the most part, these patterns were the same for both males and females. There were some gender differences in reasons for participation, however:

- For females, being creative was quite stable in importance throughout life. For males, there was a gradual decline in importance to the mid-adult years, followed by an increase throughout the rest of the lifetime.
- For males, being with the family was increasingly important throughout the lifespan as a reason for participation. This reason peaked in importance for females in the mid-adult years, and declined thereafter.



- Helping the community increased in importance throughout life for females. For males, this increasing interest was most apparent after the age of 50.

INTEREST IN NEW ACTIVITIES

The desire to start a new activity was seen most often among young adults and decreased with age. About two-thirds of the young adult group (under 25 years) was interested in a new activity, compared to 27% of those 65 years of age or older. This was true for both males and females.

Table 5: Desired Types of Activities for Each Age Group: Males

	Males	Females
Under 25 years:	Exercise-oriented Team sports Skiing Racquet sports Self-propelled	Exercise-oriented Skiing Resource-based Racquet sports Team sports Swimming
25 to 34 years:	Resource-based Exercise-oriented Self-propelled Team sports Skiing	Exercise-oriented Resource-based Racquet sports Swimming Self-propelled
35 to 44 years:*	Resource-based Exercise-oriented Self-propelled Racquet sports Skiing	Exercise-oriented Self-propelled Resource-based Racquet sports Swimming
45 to 64 years:*	Resource-based Golf Exercise-oriented Swimming Self-propelled	Exercise-oriented Creative, cultural Swimming Golf Self-propelled
65 years or over	Resource-based Exercise-oriented Creative, cultural Swimming Golf	Creative, cultural Exercise-oriented Self-propelled Golf Resource-based

* The age categories are slightly different for this analysis.

** The following types of activities are included in the activity categories:

Exercise-oriented: Walking for pleasure, swimming, bicycling.

Resource-based: Camping, fishing, hunting, boating.

Self-propelled: Hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing/kayaking.

Creative, Cultural, Social and Passive: Crafts/hobbies, gardening, and board games.



However, the desire for a new activity did vary *within age* groups. Senior adults who were currently quite active were often more likely to desire a new activity than were younger people with lower levels of activity (Jackson, 1989).

The types of activities which each age group would like to start are shown in Table 5. These are listed in order of importance for each group. As with favorite activities, these desired activities vary for males and females within each age category.

Exercise-oriented activities are among the most desired activities for all age groups. Overall, the more strenuous activities are desired by younger adults. Interest in starting golf is highest among the two oldest age categories, for both males and females. Creative, cultural, social, and passive activities are of more interest to older adults, particularly females.

Comparison with the results of the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, conducted previously by Alberta Recreation and Parks, show that these age-based patterns have been quite stable during the 1980s (Jackson, 1989).

CONSTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATION

What are the barriers that discourage people from participating in their desired activities? The 1988 *General Recreation Survey* data show that the highest-ranked barriers for all age groups include the cost of equipment, admission fees and charges, the perception that facilities are overcrowded, and a lack of opportunity near home. Being too busy with work is an important constraint among all age groups, except for those 65 years of age or over.

Looking at the full range of barriers included in the 1988 *General Recreation Survey*, we found several age-related patterns (Jackson, 1989):

Barriers which decline in importance with age:

- Cost of equipment and supplies
- Cost of admission fees
- Concern about lack of transportation and the cost of transportation declines with age, but has an increased effect on those 65 years of age or over.

Barriers which increase in importance with age:

- Not having the physical abilities
- Physically unable to take part.

Barriers which are particularly important to young adults and older adults but of less importance in the mid-adult years:

- Not knowing where to participate
- Not knowing where to learn



- Difficulty finding others with whom to participate.

Barriers important to the middle-age groups, but less so to both younger and older people:

- Too busy with work
- Too busy with family.

These age patterns for barriers seem to be quite stable. They are very similar to those shown in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.

IMPLICATIONS

The 1988 *General Recreation Survey* results show that participation in many activities declines with age. However, recreation agencies can help to encourage participation by offering opportunities for the development of life-long skills such as cycling, golf, and gardening. Adapting and modifying activities will also help to address the barriers of physical inability felt by older adults. Opportunities to learn new recreation activities and leadership skills should be offered to all age groups.

Studies have shown that young adults are the main users of public recreation facilities (Howard and Crompton, 1984). Fewer than 10% of older adults use any municipal recreation services or parks. The most serious gap is for the 55 to 64 year age group, who do not make use of seniors' services. In order to maintain community support for recreation services, agencies will need to encourage use by mature adults (Howard and Crompton, 1984). One of the barriers to be overcome is the perception that parks and facilities are for younger people (Schroeder and Wiens, 1986). Do your programs and facilities create this feeling in your community? How can you begin to change this?

Will the typical age-related declines in participation observed in 1980s continue into the future? People in their mid-adult years and the baby-boomers have different recreation experiences and skills than their parents did at that age (Warnick, 1987). Higher levels of recreation participation are also associated with higher education levels; the younger generations are now better educated. How will these trends affect participation as these adults move into the mature adult years?

In the future, it will be important for practitioners to monitor age trends in their own regions or communities. Adapting recreation services to reflect these age trends will help to ensure that community leisure needs continue to be met.

FURTHER READING

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of *Look at Leisure* will discuss recreation trends.

FURTHER INFORMATION

From time to time, special analyses of the General Recreation Survey data are carried out. If you have any analysis requests, please let us know. We may be able to help. We can also provide copies of the questionnaire used in the survey.

For those interested in more information about recreation patterns of specific age groups, we have available two previous bulletins in the *Look at Leisure* series. These are *Look at Leisure* No. 18 (Recreation Patterns of Older Adults) and No. 22 (Youth and Leisure).

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