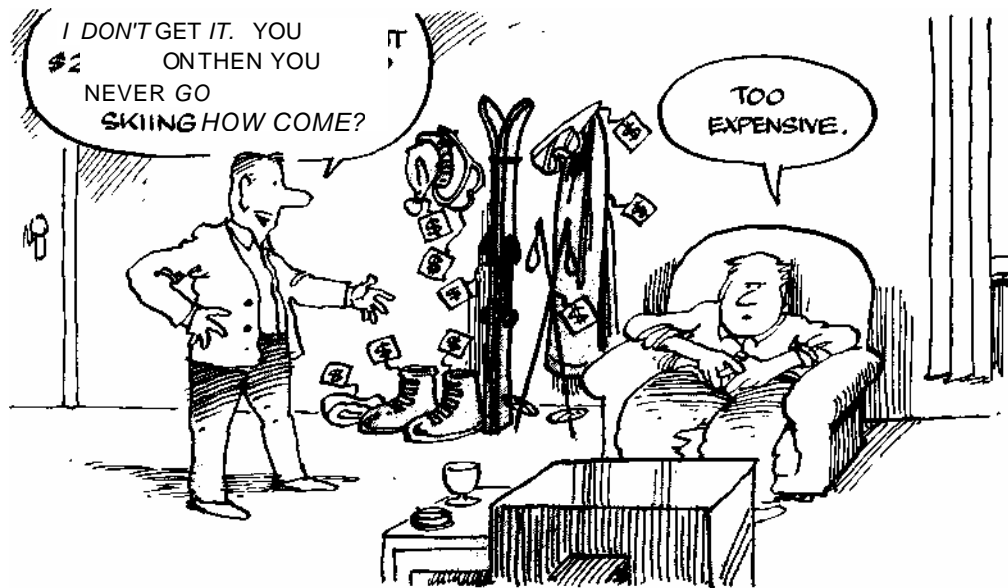


A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 15

CEASING PARTICIPATION IN RECREATION ACTIVITIES

This is the fifteenth bulletin in a series, by Alberta Recreation and Parks, which presents results of general recreation conducted by the department. The bulletin looks at recreation activities recently discontinued by respondents, and the importance of various reasons for ceasing participation in these activities. The discussion focuses on results of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, and compares the findings with those from the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.



The information presented in this bulletin is based on responses to the following questions:

4. (a) Is there any leisure time activity that you USED to PARTICIPATE in REGULARLY during the last few years, but have NOT participated in, during the LAST 12 MONTHS?

Yes NO If NO, Please go to question 5, page 10.

If YES, please specify the activity. (If there is more than one activity that you used to participate in regularly, but have NOT participated in during the LAST 12 MONTHS, please list the one that first comes to your mind.)

Name ONE activity only: _____

- (b) People have many reasons for NOT participating in a leisure activity. We would like to know your reasons for not participating in this activity.

Based on the activity that you indicated you have NOT participated in during the PAST 12 months, how IMPORTANT are EACH of the following reasons for lack of participation to YOU? (Please circle ONE number for EACH reason.)

	NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT			EXTREMELY IMPORTANT	
No longer interested	1	2	3	4	5
Family commitments	1	2	3	4	5
Work commitments	1	2	3	4	5
I am physically unable to participate	1	2	3	4	5
The cost of transportation	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of transportation	1	2	3	4	5
Admission, rental fees, or other charges for recreation facilities or programs	1	2	3	4	5
Don't know where I can participate in this activity	1	2	3	4	5
It is difficult to find others to participate with	1	2	3	4	5
The cost (rental or purchase) of equipment, material and supplies	1	2	3	4	5
The recreational facilities or areas are overcrowded	1	2	3	4	5
I'm not at ease in social situations	1	2	3	4	5
There is no opportunity to participate near my home	1	2	3	4	5
The recreational facilities or areas are poorly kept or maintained	1	2	3	4	5
Took up another activity	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5



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HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, which are discussed in this issue, include the following:

- One-half of those answering the survey had discontinued a recreational activity in the previous year.
- Curling and downhill skiing were the two activities which were discontinued by the highest number of respondents.
- The main reasons for ceasing participation in recreation activities were work and family commitments, and taking up another activity.
- Three reasons for non-participation which appear to have increased in importance since 1981 include family commitments, physical inability, and the cost of admission fees and other charges.
- The effects of barriers to participation appear to be greatest for young adults and seniors, members of single parent families, and those with lower education and income levels.

INTRODUCTION

A great deal is known about recreation participants, but it is only recently that researchers have begun to look closely at non-participants, and the reasons why they do not participate. One way of understanding non-participation is to study ceasing participation in activities, and to look at reasons why recreation activities are discontinued.

Research on non-participation helps recreation agencies to understand the factors which may limit participation in their programs, and to recognize groups in the community who may encounter obstacles to participation. With such information, recreation practitioners may be able to modify their programs to reduce the effects of certain barriers, particularly for those groups who encounter the greatest difficulties.

CEASING PARTICIPATION

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* looked at one aspect of non-participation. The survey asked respondents to indicate if they had stopped participating in an activity in the previous year, and then looked at the reasons for their non-participation. One-half of those answering the survey had discontinued participation in a recreation activity in the previous year. Of those who had discontinued an activity, close to one-half had not



replaced it with another pursuit. The remaining respondents (just over one-half of those discontinuing participation) reported that they had taken up a new activity in the past year. Ceasing participation in an activity was most likely to be reported by young adults (under 35 years of age), and by people with higher levels of education. The survey results indicate, however, that these respondents were also very likely to have started a new activity during that time (see *A Look at Leisure Bulletin No. 14*). This suggests that adults under 35 years of age, and those with higher education levels, may be most likely to try different activities, and to substitute one recreation activity for another.

Respondents whose households consisted of a couple with pre-school-age children also tended to drop out of activities at a higher rate than did people from other types of households. Other studies have found that involvement in community recreation activities may drop off during this stage of the life cycle, but may increase again when children start attending school (e.g., Witt and Goodale, 1981).

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES DISCONTINUED

Respondents who had stopped participating in an activity were asked to name the activity which they had discontinued. In total, 71 different pursuits were reported. The ten most frequently mentioned activities are listed below. One-half of all those who had ceased participation identified an activity from this list.

1. Curling
2. Downhill skiing
3. Racquetball/squash
4. Bowling
5. Baseball
6. Swimming
7. Hunting, shooting
8. Ice hockey
9. Physical fitness, aerobics
10. Golf

Although these activities were discontinued by a relatively high number of respondents, the survey findings do not indicate an overall decline in participation from 1981 to 1984 for most of the activities. The only activity for which



general population participation levels appear to have decreased is bowling. This may mean that there is a relatively high rate of participant turnover for these activities, with those who are ceasing participation constantly being replaced by new participants.

Since most of the 71 activities were mentioned by a small number of respondents, the individual activities were grouped into eight categories for the remaining analyses. These categories are identified in Table 1 (p. 6), and examples of activities included in each group are shown in the table. There were three activities (i.e., curling, downhill skiing, and racquetball/squash) which were mentioned frequently enough to be treated on an individual basis in the analysis.

The percentages of respondents who discontinued each type of activity are also shown in Table 1. Almost one-third of those ceasing an activity had stopped participating in an exercise-oriented pursuit. Team sports and mechanized/extractive outdoor activities were each discontinued by 15% of respondents. This was followed by curling (9%), downhill skiing (8%), non-mechanized outdoor activities (6%), creative-cultural, social and passive activities (6%), and racquetball/squash (5%).

IMPORTANCE OF REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

Why did respondents stop participating in their specified recreation activities? As indicated in Figure 1 (p. 7), the reasons which were important to the greatest percentage of respondents were related to lack of time. These included work commitments, family commitments, and taking up another activity. These personal reasons were followed in importance by three factors associated with the provision of recreation services. These were: overcrowded facilities; admission, fees, and charges for recreation programs; and a lack of opportunity to participate near home.



TABLE 1
Important Reasons for Non-Participation
in Types of Recreation Activities

1. Exercise-Oriented Activities (31.1%)

Examples: Tennis, bicycling, ice skating, body building
Main Reasons: Work and family commitments, took up another activity, no opportunity near home, facilities overcrowded.

2. Team Sports (15.1%)

Examples: Baseball, basketball, ice hockey, soccer
Main Reasons: Work and family commitments, took up another activity, no opportunity near home, facilities overcrowded, and not knowing where to participate.

3. Outdoor Mechanized and Extractive Activities (14.6%)

Examples: Snowmobiling, boating, fishing, hunting
Main Reasons: Work and family commitments, facilities overcrowded, cost of equipment, no opportunity to participate near home, cost of transportation, and poorly maintained recreational facilities or areas.

4. Curling (9.5%)

Main Reasons: Family and work commitments, took up another activity, physically unable to participate, and admission fees or other charges for facilities or programs.

5. Downhill Skiing (8.4%)

Main Reasons: Admission fees/charges for facilities or programs, cost of equipment, overcrowded facilities, cost of transportation, and work commitments.

6. Outdoor (Non-Mechanized) Activities (6.4%)

Examples: Backpacking, canoeing, cross-country skiing
Main Reasons: Work commitments, took up another activity, difficulty finding others with whom to participate, family commitments, and no opportunity near home.

7. Creative-Cultural, Social, and Passive (5.9%)

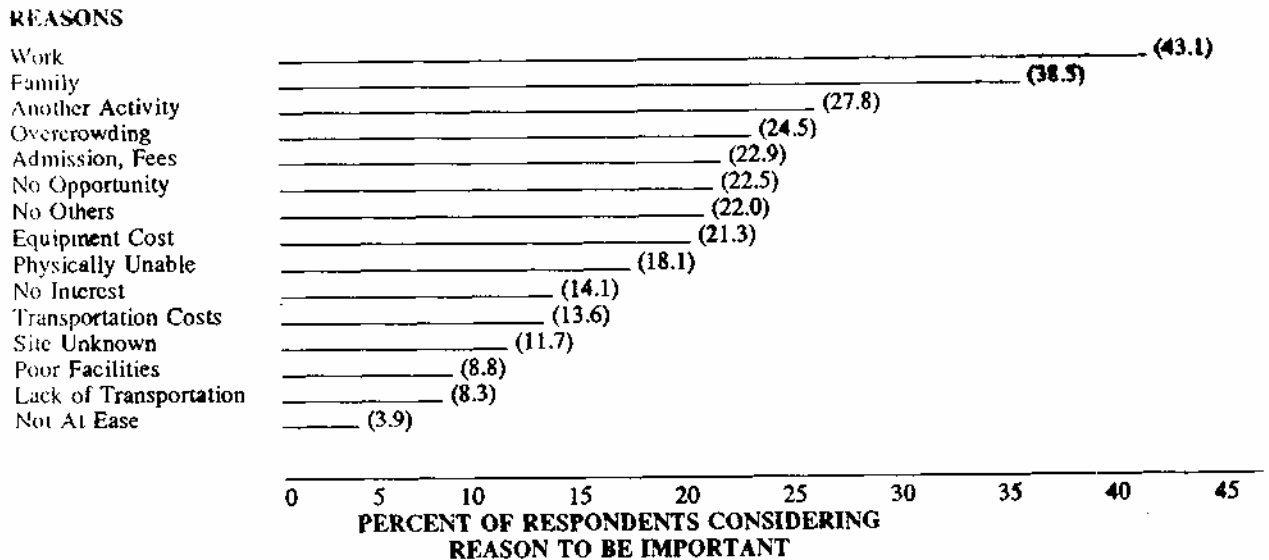
Examples: Hobbies, watching T.V., attending courses
Main Reasons: Work and family commitments, took up another activity, difficulty finding others to participate with, cost of equipment, and no longer interested.

8. Racquetball/Squash (5.2%)

Main Reasons: Work and family commitments, difficulty finding others with whom to participate, admission fees and other charges, and took up another activity.



FIGURE 1
IMPORTANCE OF REASONS FOR CEASING
PARTICIPATION IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES



The survey responses suggest that it is combinations of reasons, rather than individual reasons, which may interfere with participation in recreation activities. It is likely that some people may be mildly affected by several obstacles, while others may encounter one or two strong reasons which limit their participation.

Reasons for non-participation were also examined in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. In this previous survey, respondents were asked to rate the importance of various barriers preventing their participation in a *desired* activity. Because the 1981 and 1984 surveys looked at different aspects of non-participation, direct comparisons of the results of the two studies were limited. General comparisons were possible, however, and the findings were fairly consistent for the two surveys. Work commitments were identified as the most important reason for



non-participation in both cases. Overcrowding of facilities was also rated highly as a barrier in both 1981 and 1984.

There were three reasons for non-participation which appear to have increased in importance from 1981 to 1984. These include both family commitments, and the cost of admission, fees, and charges for recreation programs. The third reason, physical inability to participate, was also a problem for more people in 1984, particularly for those in the older age categories.

The findings of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* are also similar to those of other studies which have looked at non-participation in recreation activities. Most of these studies have found that the key reasons include a lack of time, lack of facilities, lack of interest, lack of funds, and changing physical abilities. Godbey(1985) has stressed that lack of awareness of available recreation opportunities is also a very significant factor. In addition, other studies have looked at non-participation among children (e.g., Orlick, 1974), or have examined the barriers experienced by special populations (e.g., West, 1984).

NON-PARTICIPATION IN SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

The importance of the reasons for non-participation varied according to the type of activity which was discontinued. The main reasons for ceasing each type of activity are reported in Table 1. These findings are important to recreation practitioners since they may help to explain why people may drop out of programs, or why certain programs or facilities are not being used to their fullest extent.

The table shows that overcrowding of facilities was perceived as a problem by participants in exercise-oriented activities, team sports, mechanized and extractive outdoor activities, and downhill skiing. On the other hand, the cost of admission, fees, and other charges was a concern for those dropping out of curling, racquetball/squash, and downhill skiing. Many of the respondents who stopped participating in non-mechanized outdoor activities, racquetball/squash, and creative-cultural, social and passive activities reported lack of partners or companions as a reason. Physical inability to participate was important for many respondents who discontinued participation in curling.



The most important reasons for discontinuing participation in each type of activity were very similar to the barriers reported for these activity groupings in 1981. There were, however, a few differences between the 1984 and the 1981 findings which are interesting to note. First, physical inability to participate increased in importance as a problem for all types of activities, while an increased effect of family commitments was also felt across most activities, in 1984. Transportation and admission costs were found to be more of a concern for downhill skiing participants in 1984 than in 1981.

Other factors appear to have decreased in importance since 1981. Overcrowding, which was the highest ranked barrier for racquetball participants in 1981, appeared to be much less of a problem in 1984.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION?

How did the reasons for non-participation vary among the respondents? Were there some participants who were affected more strongly by certain types of reasons? Overall, it was found that obstacles to recreation participation were greatest for several types of respondents, including adults under 35 years of age, seniors, females, single parent families, and those with lower education and income levels. This picture is very consistent with the findings from the 1981 survey (see *A Look at Leisure Bulletin No. 5*). A comparison of the 1981 and 1984 survey results indicates, however, that adults under 35 years, and those from single parent families are encountering even more barriers to participation in recreation activities than they did in 1981.

The study also showed that different types of respondents tend to report different reasons for non-participation. For example, the costs of admission and other fees, and equipment costs, were particularly important for females, members of single parent families, and those in the lower income categories. Adults under 35 years, and particularly those under 25 years of age, also identified equipment costs as a problem. Not knowing where to participate was an important concern for these latter two age groups, as well as for single persons, and newcomers to the province. Those who expressed that they were no longer interested in participating were most likely to be older adults (45 to 64 years of age), and those with lower education levels.



Overcrowding of facilities appeared to be felt most severely by Calgary respondents.

IMPLICATIONS

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* has identified many reasons why people may discontinue participation in recreation activities. Are there any additional reasons which are problems in your community? Recreation agencies may have very little control over some reasons such as work commitments, but there are many factors whose effects might be reduced by program planning. As recreation practitioners, how can you reduce the number of drop-outs in your programs? Reasons for non-participation may be different for various types of activities, and may require different types of programming approaches. For example, a lack of partners was identified as a problem for participants in certain activities. Social opportunities, such as competition ladders for racquetball/squash, and events such as organized cross-country ski outings might help participants to overcome this barrier. Is there anything you can do about the costs of admission, fees, and charges for certain activities, such as curling, and racquetball/ squash? Physical inability has increased in importance as a reason for non-participation for all types of activities, especially for those in the older age groups. What can you do to help these people find activities which are suited to their physical abilities, so that they can continue their recreation interests?

Does your agency try to identify which groups in the community are the "users" and "non-users" of your facilities and programs? Are there some groups who are not being reached effectively with your current offerings? The study results show that some people in the community may encounter more blocks to participation than do others. What can you do to reduce the effects of barriers felt by young adults and seniors, single parent families, and those in the lower income groups?

Lack of awareness of program offerings may be a significant problem in many communities, particularly among low-income groups (Godbey, 1985). The public opinion survey also found that single adults, those under 35 years of age, and newcomers to Alberta, had difficulty knowing where they could participate. Those interested in team sports also tended to see this as a problem. Do you try to ensure that all segments of your community are aware of your recreation facilities and programs? Do you try different methods for contacting the various target groups?



Looking at non-participation, as well as participation in activities, is important for a sound marketing approach to the provision of recreation services. By understanding non-participation, recreation agencies may be able to reduce drop-out rates and encourage greater involvement in their programs. In addition, this approach will also help agencies to achieve the important goal of a fair or equitable distribution of leisure services in the community.

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THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue in the *A Look at Leisure* series will look at regional variations in recreational activity patterns and opinions within Alberta.

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