

A Look at Leisure

The Influence of Age and Gender on Recreation Participation

Introduction

The *A Look at Leisure* series has presented summaries of the results produced from the *Alberta Recreation Survey* since 1981. The *Alberta Recreation Survey* is conducted every four years using a mail survey to a representative sample of Alberta households. The most recent survey was conducted in 2004 and provided a sample of 3,217 respondents.

Previous *A Look at Leisure* bulletins have provided an overview of participation patterns, favourite activities, reasons for participation, and constraints. In this report, we take a closer look at these variables but with emphasis on differences and similarities between age and gender groups.

Participation Preferences

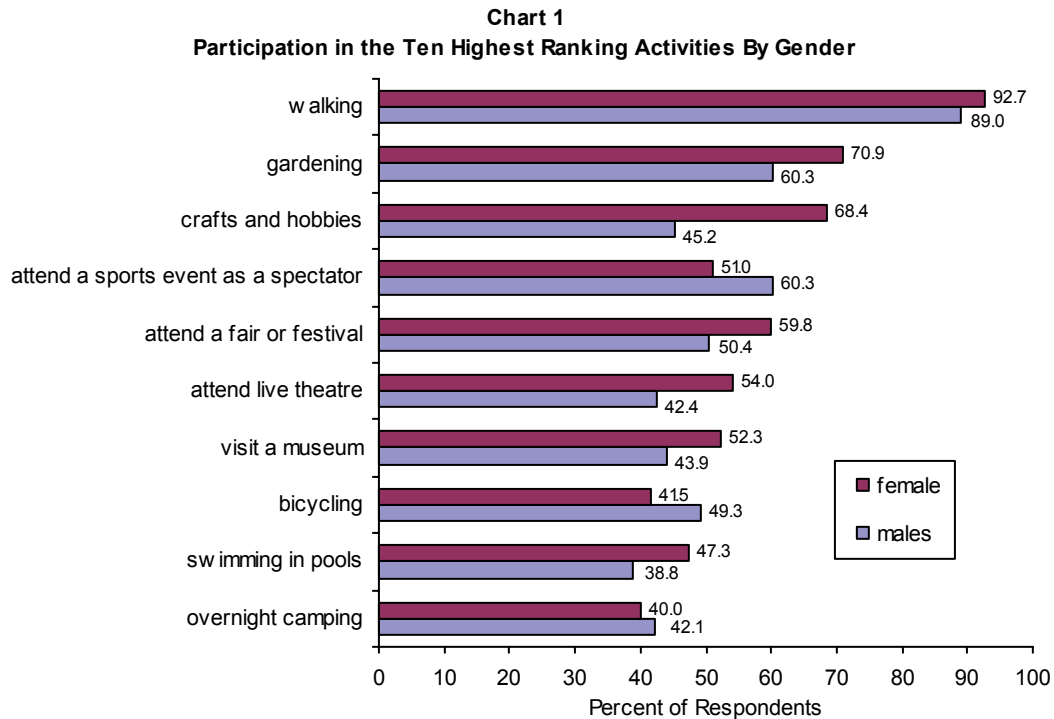
The questionnaire used for the *Alberta Recreation Survey* records the demographic characteristics of respondents and asks about participation in a range of activities by household members and individual respondents. In this discussion of participation, focus is on the top 10 activities that respondents took part in and this is compared to the demographic information that respondents provided.

The most popular activity is walking for pleasure, reported by 90.4% of respondents. Females (92.7%) are slightly more likely than males (89.0%) to take part (Chart 1), a result that reflects the findings from studies conducted elsewhere (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2004).

The preference among females for gardening and for sports among males has been identified in studies from the United States (“The Role of Recreation in American Society – What Americans Seek Through Recreation”, p. 2). In the *Alberta Recreation Survey*, gardening ranks second overall with 65.4% of respondents taking part and hobbies and crafts ranks third (56.2%). Both of these activities are more popular with females than males while males are more likely to attend a sports events as a spectator, which ranks fourth overall. Males are also more likely to take part in bicycling and overnight camping while the remainder of the top 10 activities is more popular with females.

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Walking tends to be found as the leading activity across all age groups. For people over the age of 55, distinctions have been made between Baby-Boomers and those over the age of 75, with the former tending to be more active. For those over the age of 55, walking, golf, swimming and aerobics/fitness are the most popular activities (New South Wales Department for Women, p. 12).

The desire for access to health and fitness programming has been identified among affluent Baby-Boomers (ProMatura Group and Pulte Homes, p. 1). This particular segment has been shown to be quite active to begin with, for example, participation in strength training and cardio activities at least three times per week. This is true of males and females in this segment. In addition, almost half of males have been found to play golf at least once per week (ProMatura Group and Pulte Homes, pp. 13-14).

A closer look at the *Alberta Recreation Survey* data shows how the ages of males and females influence participation (Table 1). Here we see that walking is most popular with 96.3% of females from the 26 to 35 age group and 95.4% from the 36 to 45 group. The 26 to 35 age group also has the highest rate of participation among males at 93.3%, with 91.6% of males in the 46 to 55 group also reporting participation.

Table 1 also shows that over 90% of females in each age group except for the 65 and over group take part in walking for pleasure. For males, participation rates fall below 90% for the 25 and under, 36 to 45, 56 to 65 and over 65 age groups.

Gardening is the second most popular activity and, again, participation is most prevalent among females, particularly those in the age groups between 36 and 65. The highest participation rate among females (79.8%) is found in the 56 to 65 group followed by 77.9% of those in the 46 to 55 group. For males the highest rate is 67.9% for the over 65 group.

Females dominate participation in hobbies and crafts with those in the 56 to 65 age group (76.1%) being most active. This group is followed by the two younger groups of 25 and under (72.3%) and 26 to 35 (72.8%). By contrast, participation is generally confined to less than half of the male population, with the highest rate being evident for males in the 56 to 65 age group (47.5%).

Males, however, are more likely to attend a sports event as a spectator, especially those in the 26 to 35 group (77.2%) and those in the 25 and under group (70.8%). Participation declines as age increases among males. This is also true of females, for whom the highest participation rates are for the 25 and under group at 64.6%, and the 26 to 35 group (61.4%).

Females across all age groups up to 65 are more likely than males to attend a fair or festival, confirming a trend that has also been noted in Australian studies (New South Wales Department for Women, p. 11). The highest participation rates are among females in the under 25 group (70.8%) as well as the 26 to 35 group (68.7%) and the 36 to 45 group (68.0%). Attending a fair or festival is also more popular among males from the younger age groups, although the level of participation tends to be between 55% and 60%, lower than females.

Other notable trends from Table 1 include:

- Rates of participation for bicycling are highest among males in the under 25, 26 to 35, and 36 to 45 age groups when compared to females.
- Females in the 25 and under age group (68.5%) have the highest participation rates for swimming in pools with rates decreasing as age increases. For males, the participation rate is highest among those in the 36 to 45 age group (61.8%) before declining as age increases.
- The rate of participation in overnight camping is highest among males in the 25 and under age group (64.6%) although females of the same age are more likely than older females to take part.

The relationship between preferences and rates of participation with gender and age are quite evident. Age and gender influence the types of activities that are popular and frequency with which participation occurs.

The aging of the population has been well-recognized since the 1980s but now, as the 21st century opens, we are at the stage where the Baby-Boom group is passing the age of 50 years and moving towards senior status. Statistics Canada data shows that the fastest growing population cohort is the oldest population group - 80 and over (Johnson, 2003; Kelly and Warnick, 1999). Behind this group is the 45 to 64 cohort, largely consisting of well-educated, reasonably well-off, and relatively health-obsessed "boomers" (Johnson, 2003; Foot, 1996; Kelly and Warnick, 1999). Their needs create demand for self-directed activities, from gardening to biking, where physical and mental health are the by-products.

Table 1
Top 10 Activities By Gender and Age

Activity	% Total Sample	% (Male)						% (Female)					
		25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65	25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
Walk for pleasure	90.4	86.2	93.3	89.7	91.6	89.8	83.0	93.1	96.3	95.4	93.3	94.0	83.5
Gardening	65.4	30.8	45.0	56.7	65.8	61.4	67.9	48.5	64.6	74.8	77.9	79.8	66.5
Crafts and hobbies	56.2	41.5	40.0	45.5	43.9	47.5	46.4	72.3	72.8	64.6	68.5	76.1	59.2
Attend a sports event as	55.4	70.8	77.2	65.7	64.3	57.3	42.3	64.6	61.4	60.3	51.7	43.6	27.5
Attend a fair or festival	54.4	56.9	58.9	57.1	52.8	47.8	36.6	70.8	68.7	68.0	56.7	60.1	36.2
Attend live theatre	47.8	43.1	41.7	36.1	43.4	50.8	39.0	49.2	48.8	51.4	59.4	63.8	50.0
Visiting a museum, art gallery	47.6	35.4	50.6	45.9	44.6	44.7	38.7	46.2	53.7	53.2	55.0	56.0	45.0
Bicycle	45.1	64.6	63.3	65.2	54.9	41.7	26.5	40.8	49.2	59.1	40.6	33.9	12.8
Swim in pools	42.7	60.0	54.4	61.8	37.6	26.8	21.1	68.5	63.8	57.8	36.9	37.6	28.0
Overnight Camping	40.7	64.6	56.1	57.1	45.1	30.2	24.7	60.8	53.7	46.5	39.3	28.0	16.5

The role of women in decision-making for leisure time is being defined by their participation in the workforce and the demand this places on their time (Zuzanek et al, 1998). Again, flexibility in recreation opportunities becomes critically important to recreation providers serving the female and family population.

Of further note is the focus of women on types of recreation activities. Unlike their male counterparts who prefer activities that have a competitive component, women seek activities that emphasize personal pleasure, enjoyment, stress relief and socialization (Wiley et al, 2000). Activities and programming that are diverse and less tied to family, then, become the core of meeting the demand from women (Kelly and Warnick, 1999).

An examination of the leading activities that respondents selected as their favourites provides further evidence of the influence of demographic characteristics.

Favourite Activities

Respondents to the *Alberta Recreation Survey* were asked to report their first, second and third favourite activity. Using the results for the first favourite, walking ranks first at 16.7% (Table 2) followed by golf (9.4%) camping (6.7%) and bicycling (4.1%).

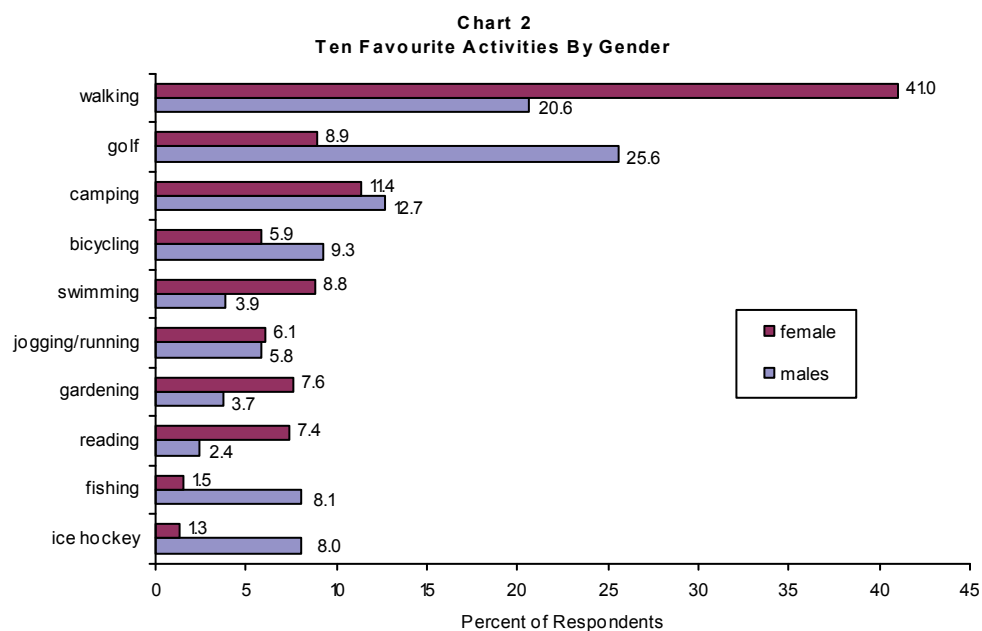
Of the top five activities listed as second and third favourites, walking remains top of the list. Indeed, the top five activities listed under second favourite remain the same as for first favourites with the exception of swimming which ranks below gardening.

There is also one change in the top five list of third favorite activities with golf dropping down the list and being replaced by gardening.

Table 2
Ten Highest Ranking
Favourite Activities
(ranked by %)

Rank	Activity	Number of Respondents	% of Respondents
1	Walking	536	16.7
2	Golf	302	9.4
3	Camping	214	6.7
4	Bicycling	131	4.1
5	Swimming	112	3.5
6	Jogging/running	101	3.1
6	Gardening	100	3.1
8	Reading	85	2.6
9	Fishing	82	2.5
9	Ice hockey	80	2.5

Chart 2 shows that there are clear differences between the favourite activities of males and females. Females are close to twice as likely (41.0%) as males (20.6%) to identify walking for pleasure as their favourite, and they are similarly more likely to report swimming and reading as favourites. Females are also more likely to select gardening as a favourite. By contrast, males (25.6%) are almost three times as likely to report golf as a favourite than females (8.9%) and are significantly more likely to also report fishing and ice hockey as favourites. Two activities, camping and jogging/running, with closely similar percentages are popular for males and females.



An examination of favourite activities by gender and age is presented in Table 3. From this data, we can see that the preference for walking among females tends to steadily increase after the age of 25, while the highest percentage for males is found among those in the over 65 age group.

For golf, where males dominate the reporting of this as a favourite activity, the highest percentage (35.0%) is found for those in the 56 to 65 age group with a slight decrease to 30.3% among those over 65. The age profile of females who report golf as a favourite is also oriented towards the older age groups with this activity being most reported among those in the 46 to 55 group (13.6%) and those in the 56 to 65 group (14.7%).

The third ranked favourite activity is camping. Between 14% and 15% of females in the 25 and under, 26 to 35 and 36 to 45 groups are most likely to report this as a favourite activity. A similar profile exists for males but with the highest percentage being found in the 36 to 45 group (18.4%)

Other notable trends include:

- higher rates of preference for bicycling among males for all age groups.
- swimming is reported as a favourite of females in the 25 and under age group at 23.0% compared to 9.5% of males.
- jogging/running is a favourite for males in the 36 to 45 age group (8.0%) and for females in the 26 to 35 age group (11.6%).
- females over the age of 36 are more likely than males to report gardening as a favourite activity. A similar pattern is suggested in the data for reading.
- fishing is a favourite for males 26 and over while ice hockey is preferred by younger males in the 25 and under, 26 to 35 and 36 to 45 age groups.

Generally, then, the activity preferences fall into four categories. Younger adults prefer sports-oriented activities while older adults prefer more passive pursuits. Activities that are done for social reasons, whether individually or as a group, such as golf, jogging or swimming, have appeal among various age groups. Similarly, activities such as swimming support an ethos of fitness, health and wellness, particularly amongst adults entering their later years.

With the clear evidence of associations between activities, gender and age, recreation practitioners have an opportunity to focus their marketing and program development initiatives. Offering programs that target specific audiences with appropriate age and gender specific messages is important. Repetitive messaging works but most important is facilitating access and making it as easy as possible to take part through choices of location, timing of programs, and having programs that accommodate all skill levels.

Reasons for Participation

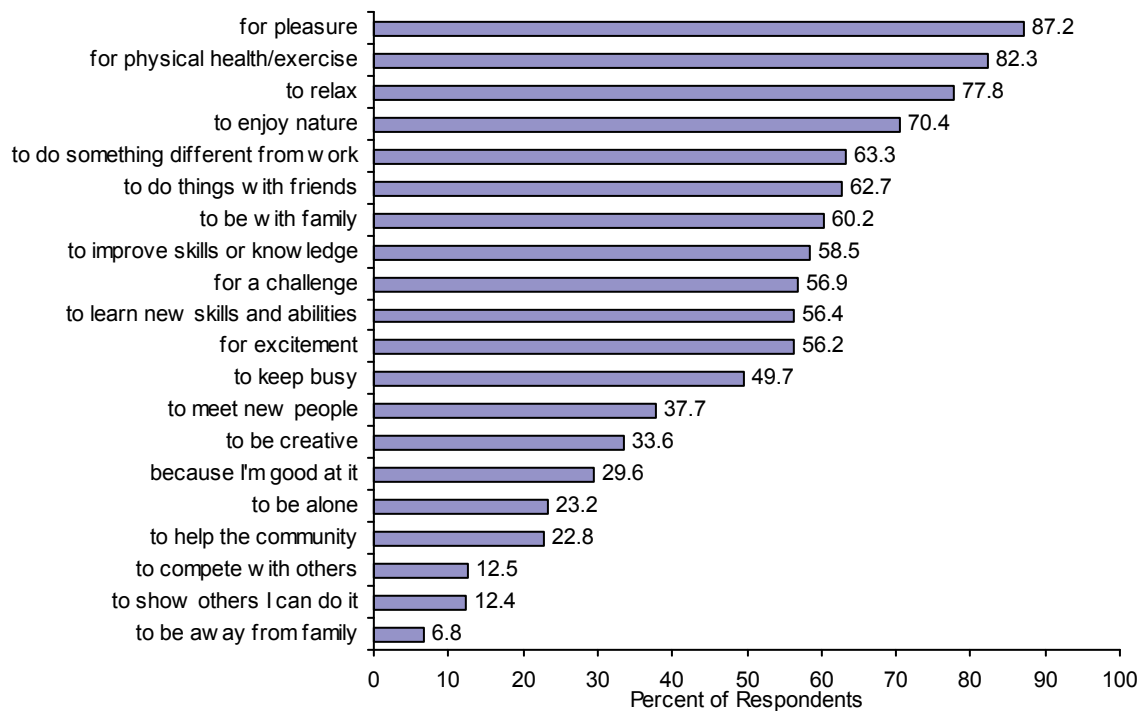
Favourite forms of recreation are often selected because of convenience, something that can be done either alone or with others, and for the pleasure they give rather than for competitive reasons (“The Role of Recreation in American Society – What Americans Seek Through Recreation”, p. 1). Socialization and health benefits are also strongly associated with being active.

The *Alberta Recreation Survey* asks about the importance of 20 possible reasons for participation in the respondents’ favourite activity. In the 2004 survey, the most important is ‘for pleasure’, which is rated as important or very important by 87.2% of respondents (Chart 3). The second most important reason is ‘for physical health and exercise’ (82.3%) and the third most important is ‘to relax’ (77.8%). Doing something different from work and spending time with family and friends also received relatively high ratings.

Table 3
Favourite Activities By Gender and Age

Activity	% Total Sample	% (Male)							% (Female)						
		25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over	25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over		
Walking	16.7	9.5	14.1	16.8	18.6	16.9	32.6	32.8	47.3	36.9	40.8	40.3	44.2		
Golf	9.4	14.3	20.0	12.8	26.4	35.0	30.3	3.3	1.6	7.8	13.6	14.7	10.5		
Camping	6.7	9.5	11.8	18.4	14.9	11.3	6.9	14.8	14.0	14.1	9.4	10.1	7.4		
Bicycling	4.1	14.3	14.1	11.2	9.1	11.3	4.0	6.6	7.0	7.8	5.8	3.9	1.1		
Swimming	3.5	9.5	2.4	4.0	4.5	2.5	4.0	23.0	10.9	8.7	5.8	6.2	8.4		
Jogging/running	3.1	4.8	7.1	8.0	7.9	5.6	1.1	9.8	11.6	10.2	3.7	0.8	0		
Gardening	3.1	0	0	2.4	3.7	3.8	6.3	1.6	1.6	8.3	7.9	10.1	12.6		
Reading	2.6	0	1.2	1.6	2.1	2.5	4.6	0	4.7	3.4	9.4	12.4	14.7		
Fishing	2.5	4.8	7.1	8.8	7.4	8.1	10.3	1.6	0.8	1.0	3.1	1.6	1.1		
Ice hockey	2.5	33.3	22.4	16.0	5.4	3.1	0	6.6	0.8	1.9	0.5	0	0		

Chart 3
Reasons Albertans Take Part In Recreation



A closer look at the leading motivations shows that there are only small differences between age groups and gender. Chart 4 compares gender to the 10 most important motivations and shows that females are slightly more likely than males to rate each motivation as important, with two exceptions. Males are more likely to identify the reasons 'for excitement' and 'for a challenge' as important.

On the basis of age, the general trend for each motivation is that importance decreases as age increases. This even applies to the reason 'for physical health and exercise' which goes against findings of research elsewhere that have shown that exercise and diet directly contribute to reduced levels of cholesterol and body fat and reduce the risk of heart disease (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1997)¹.

¹In this study, observational measurements were taken from women who engaged in walking and moderate exercise.

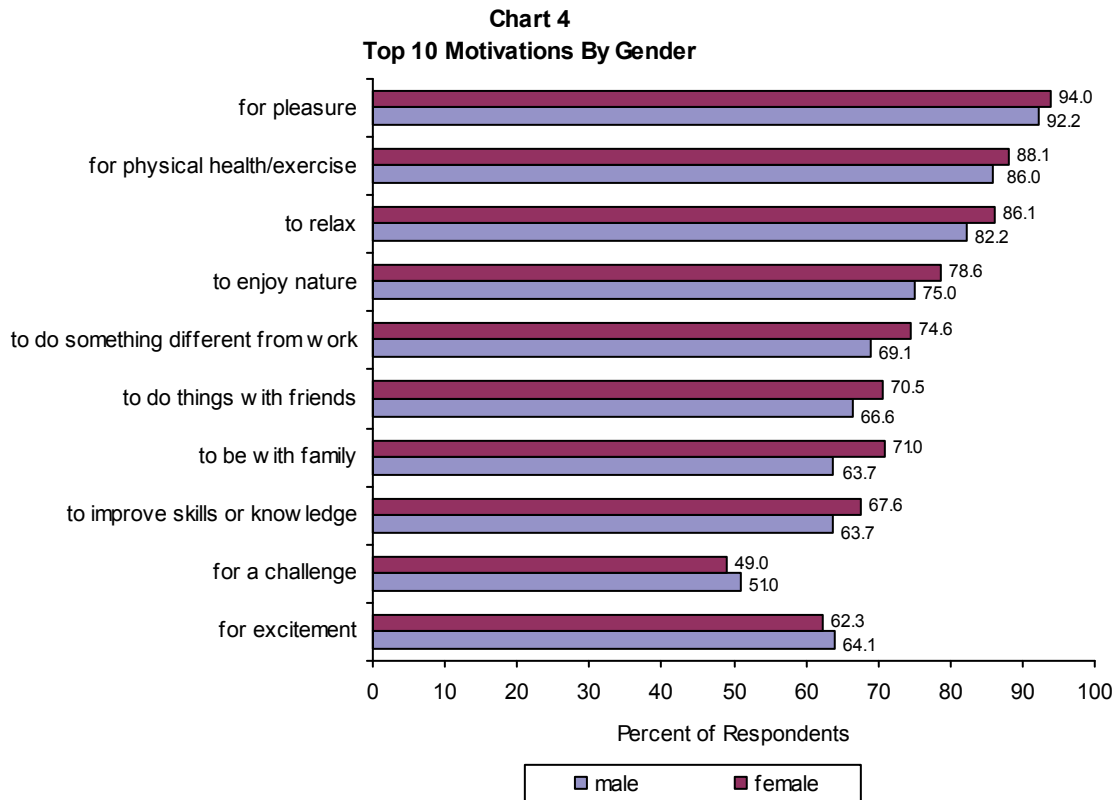
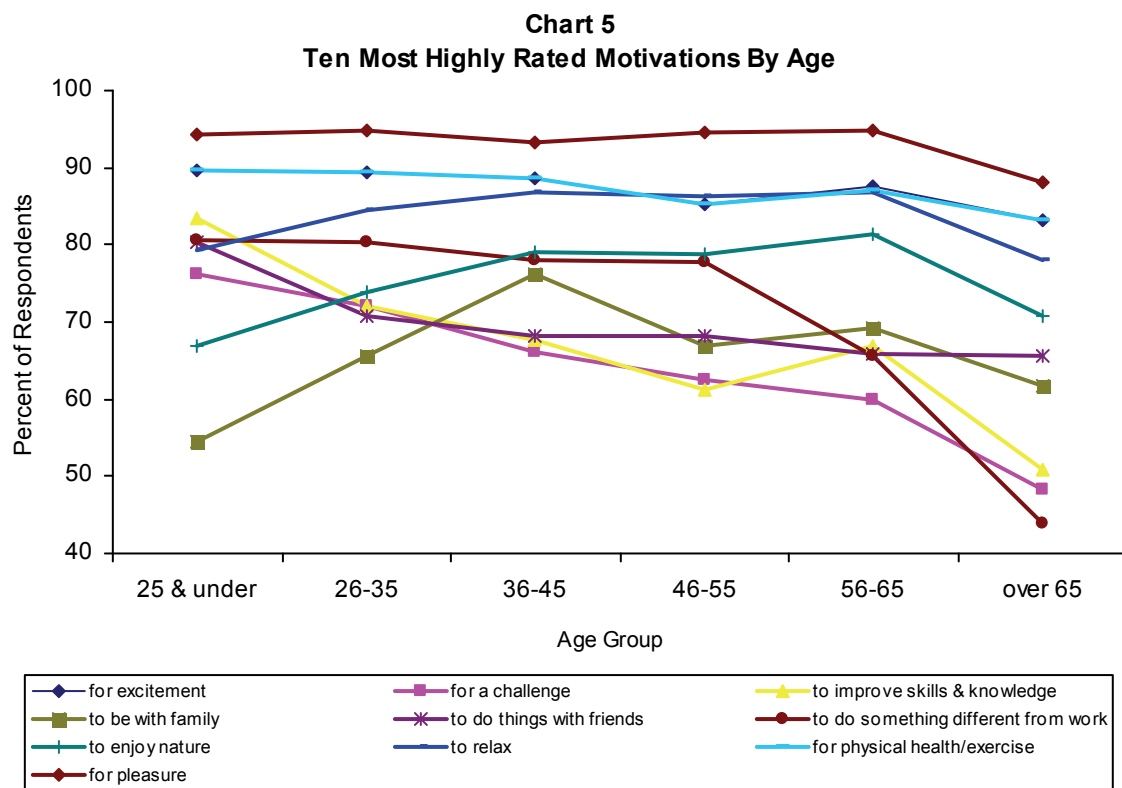


Chart 5 compares age groups to the ten most important reasons. For each of the top ten reasons, importance declines after the age of 65. Most noticeable in this regard is the reason ‘to do something different from work’ for which the decline in importance begins at age 55 where the percentage of respondents rating this reason as important or very important drops from 77.8% for those in the 46 to 55 group to 44.0% for those over 65. The reason ‘to improve skills and knowledge’ shows a similar sharp decline, from 66.9% for those in the 56 to 65 group to 50.8% for those over 65.

There are three reasons where the degree of importance increases with age before reaching a plateau and then dropping off for older age groups. First, the reason ‘to relax’ becomes more important as age increases from 25 and under (79.3%) to the 36 to 45 group (86.7%). Next, ‘to be with family’ increases from 54.4% for those 25 and under to a high of 76.2% for those in the 36 to 45 age group. Thirdly, the reason ‘to enjoy nature’ is important to 66.8% of those 25 and under but increases steadily to three quarters or more of respondents before reaching a peak of 81.4% for those in the 56 to 65 group.

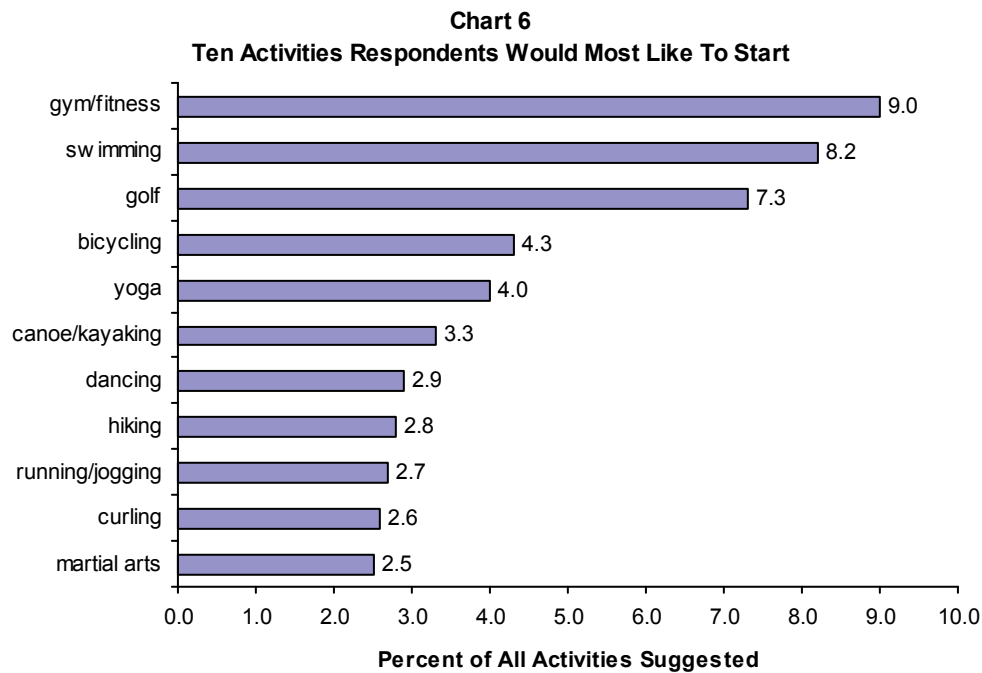
For these results it is apparent that respondents recognize the need to include recreation as a means of escaping everyday pressures and stress. As adults get older the pressure of work creates an increased



appreciation of family and a desire to seek alternative settings for recreation. Similarly, the reason 'to do things with friends' – a socializing dimension – is most important to those in the 25 and under group but becomes less important as age increases until the age group of 36 to 45 is reached. Once part of this age cohort, family is strongly influential while the importance of socializing with friends declines during this time of the life-cycle.

Interest in Starting New Activities

Forty percent (40%) of respondents to the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* indicated that they would like to start a new recreation activity. A variety of activities were suggested, of which gym/fitness activities (9.0%), swimming (8.2%), and golf (7.3%) were the three that were mentioned most often. The 10 most frequently reported are shown in Chart 6.



There is a strong relationship between the 10 most desired activities and the age of respondents (Table 4). Those who wished to start swimming were most likely to be aged between 56 and 65 (12.4%) while the least interest (5.9%) is found among those in the youngest age group of 25 and under.

Golf is of most interest to those 65 and older (13.4%) and those aged between 36 and 45 (11.0%) and, again the 25 and under group expressed the lowest interest at 1.7%. Gym/fitness activities are also more popular with older respondents - those over 46 years of age - with the highest interest expressed by those in the over 65 group (7.9%).

Of the other 10 most desired activities, there was only marginal difference between age groups. Yoga, for example was identified by 5.0% of those in the 25 and under group, 4.3% by those in the 26 to 35 and 46 to 55 groups, but also 4.7% of those in the 56 to 65 group. Similarly, hiking was popular among 3.7% of those in the 46 to 55 group, 3.4% of those 25 and under, and 3.1% of those 56 to 65.

Dancing, however, was most popular with those in the 25 and under group at 5.0%, closely matched by 4.7% of the over 65 group. Martial arts was also the most popular with those in the 25 and under group (6.7%), and the desire to start running/jogging was mostly associated with those in the 26 to 35 group (4.3%) and those in the 36 to 45 group (4.4%).

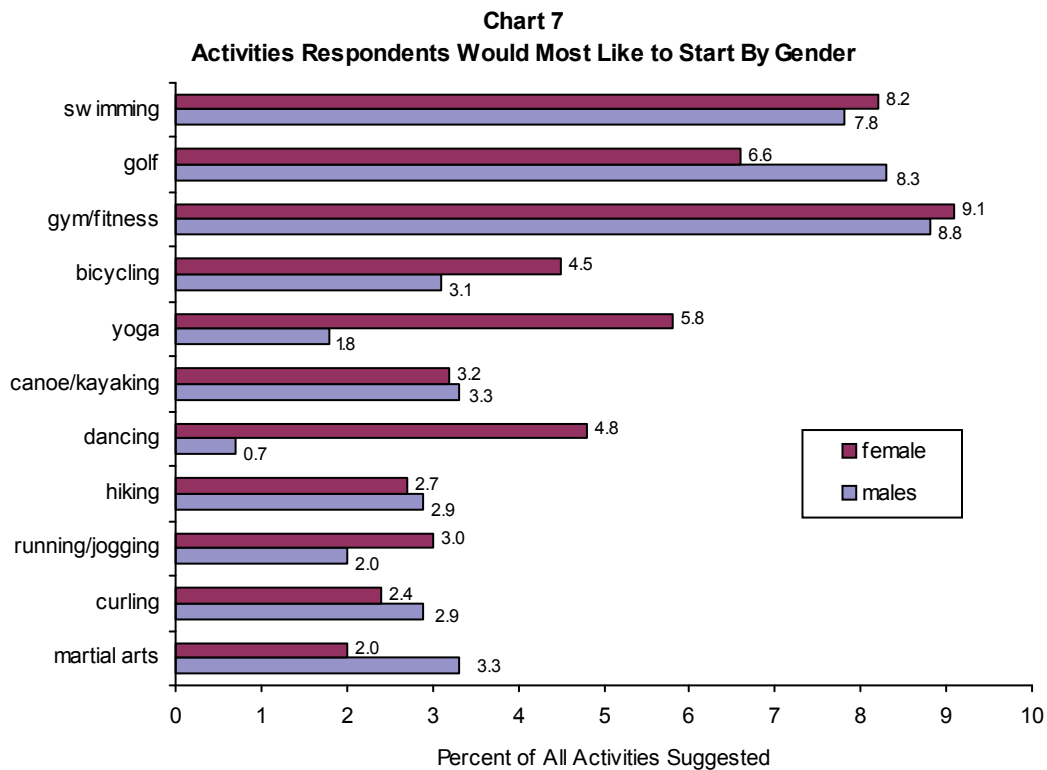
Table 4
Activities Respondents Would Most Like to Start By Age Group

	Age Group					
	% 25 & under	% 26 to 35	% 36 to 45	% 46 to 55	% 56 to 65	% Over 65
Swimming	5.9	6.8	6.6	8.0	12.4	8.7
Golf	1.7	3.6	11.0	6.6	9.3	13.4
Gym/fitness	5.0	4.7	5.9	7.3	6.7	7.9
Bicycling	3.4	4.7	3.7	5.3	5.2	0.8
Yoga	5.0	4.3	2.2	4.3	4.7	2.4
Canoe/ kayaking	4.2	3.6	4.0	3.3	3.6	1.6
Dancing	5.0	1.4	2.6	3.0	2.1	4.7
Hiking	3.4	2.2	2.9	3.7	3.1	2.4
Running/ jogging	0.8	4.3	4.4	2.0	1.0	1.6
Curling	1.7	3.6	2.2	2.0	3.6	3.1
Martial arts	6.7	2.9	4.0	1.3	0.5	-

It appears, then, that the desire to start new activities does relate to specific age groups. There are also significant patterns associated with males and females (Chart 7). Males are shown to be most likely to have an interest in golf, curling and martial arts. By contrast, activities that are most desired by females are:

- Swimming
- Bicycling
- Yoga
- Dancing
- Running/jogging

Gym/fitness activities, hiking and canoeing/kayaking were almost equally preferred by males and females.



There are also trends evident within the gender groups. Among males, swimming is desired most by those over the age of 55 and golf is desired by 21.6% of males over the age of 65 (Table 5). By contrast, males in the youngest group of 25 and under are most likely to want to start gym/fitness activities.

Among females, swimming is preferred as a new activity for those between the ages of 46 and 65 while golf is identified by most by those in the 36 to 45 group. In complete contrast to males, it is those females over the age of 65 who reported a desire to begin gym/fitness activities, and this group also had the strongest desire for starting dancing.

Other studies have identified emerging activities of interest among affluent Baby-Boomers and seniors (ProMatura Group and Pulte Homes Inc., 2007, pp. 1-5). These studies have found that adventure-oriented activities such as hiking and river-rafting lead the list of most desired activities. However, interest in these remains behind the desire for walking and martial arts, or similar activities that promote health and wellness (ProMatura Group and Pulte Homes Inc., 2007, p 2).

Table 5
Activities Respondents Would Most Like to Start By Gender and Age

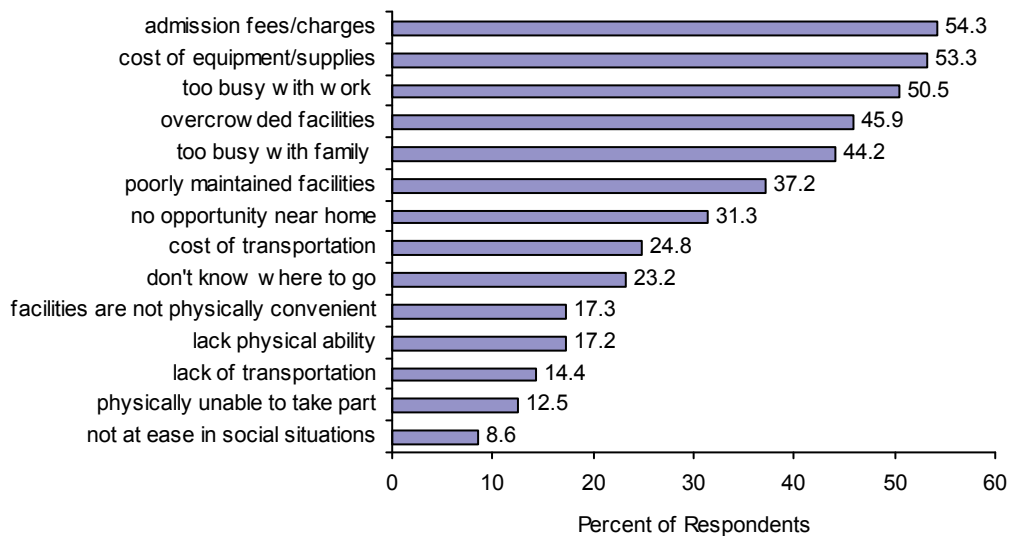
Activity	%											
	25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65	25 &	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
Swimming	-	7.5	6.7	6.2	12.6	10.8	8.0	5.7	6.6	10.0	12.2	5.9
Golf	-	4.2	5.8	8.7	9.5	21.6	2.3	3.2	14.4	4.3	9.2	2.0
Gym/fitness	9.7	6.7	6.7	6.2	6.3	5.4	3.4	3.2	5.4	8.6	7.1	11.8
Bicycling	-	2.5	-	3.7	7.4	-	4.5	6.4	6.0	7.1	3.1	2.0
Yoga	-	2.5	-	1.9	4.2	1.4	6.8	5.7	3.6	7.1	5.1	3.9
Canoe/kayaking	3.2	-	-	1.9	-	-	4.5	4.5	3.0	4.3	2.0	-
Dancing	3.2	-	-	1.9	-	-	5.7	2.5	4.2	4.3	4.1	11.8
Hiking	-	1.7	2.9	4.3	3.2	4.1	4.5	2.5	3.0	2.9	3.1	-
Running/jogging	-	4.2	1.9	1.2	2.1	1.4	1.1	4.5	6.0	2.9	-	-
Curling	-	4.2	2.9	3.1	2.1	2.7	2.3	3.2	1.8	0.7	5.1	3.9
Marital arts	6.5	4.2	8.7	1.2	1.1	-	6.8	1.9	1.2	1.4	-	-

Constraints to Participation

Just over half of those respondents who want to start a new activity identified the cost of admission fees/charges (54.3%), equipment materials and supplies (53.3%), and being too busy with work (50.5%) as the main constraints that prevent them from taking part in activities they would like to start (Chart 8).

Constraints such as being busy with family and overcrowded facilities were considered to be important or very important by between 40% and 50% of respondents while 37.2% of respondents identified poorly maintained facilities as an important limitation. Close to one-third of respondents also indicated that 'no opportunity near home' was an important constraint. The remaining potential constraints are important to less than one-quarter of respondents and may be more reflective of specific personal situations.

Chart 8
Constraints to Participation, 2004



Females are more likely to find the economic reasons as constraints to participation (Chart 9). Compared to males (50.2%), 58.1% of females rated 'admission fees and charges' as an important or very important constraint. Similarly, 56.2% of females rated 'the cost of equipment and supplies' as important compared to 50.5% of males.

Females were also more likely to give higher ratings to

- overcrowded facilities
- too busy with family
- poorly maintained facilities
- no opportunity near home
- not knowing where to go
- lack of transportation
- not at ease in social situations.

Males (52.2%) were more likely than females (48.9%) to rate 'too busy with work' as a constraint. There was little difference between the gender groups for the remaining reasons that were tested on the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*.

Chart 9
Constraints to Participation By Gender

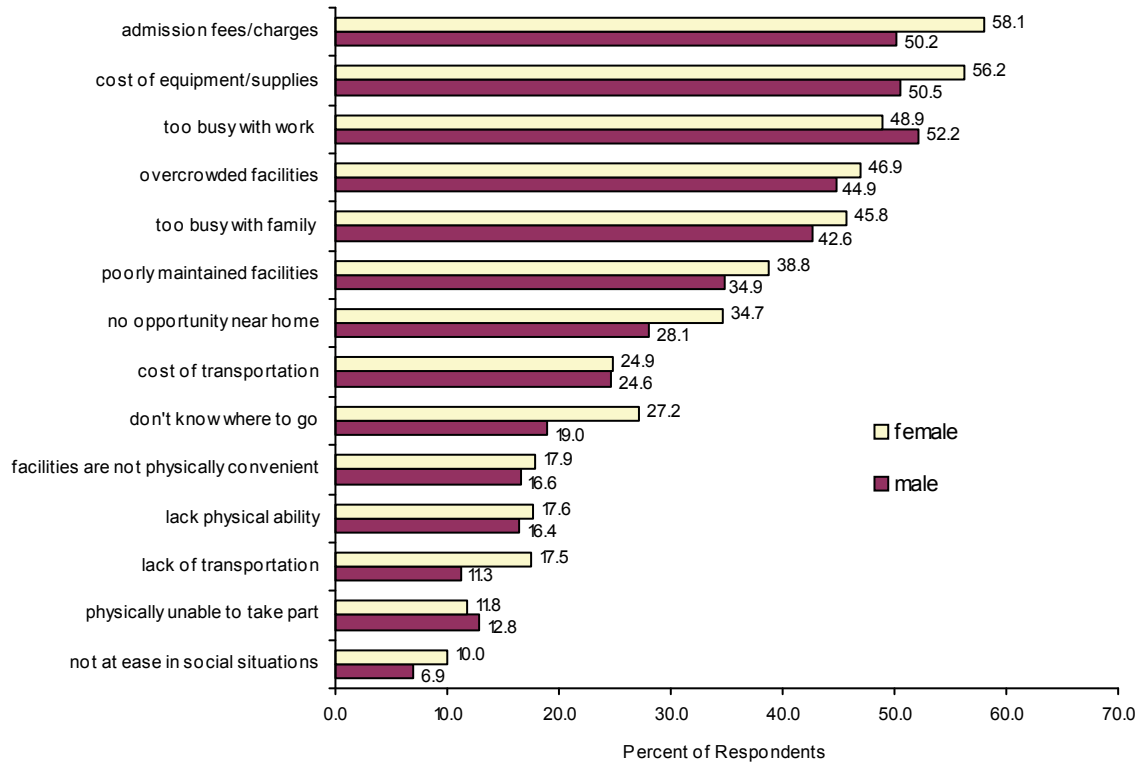
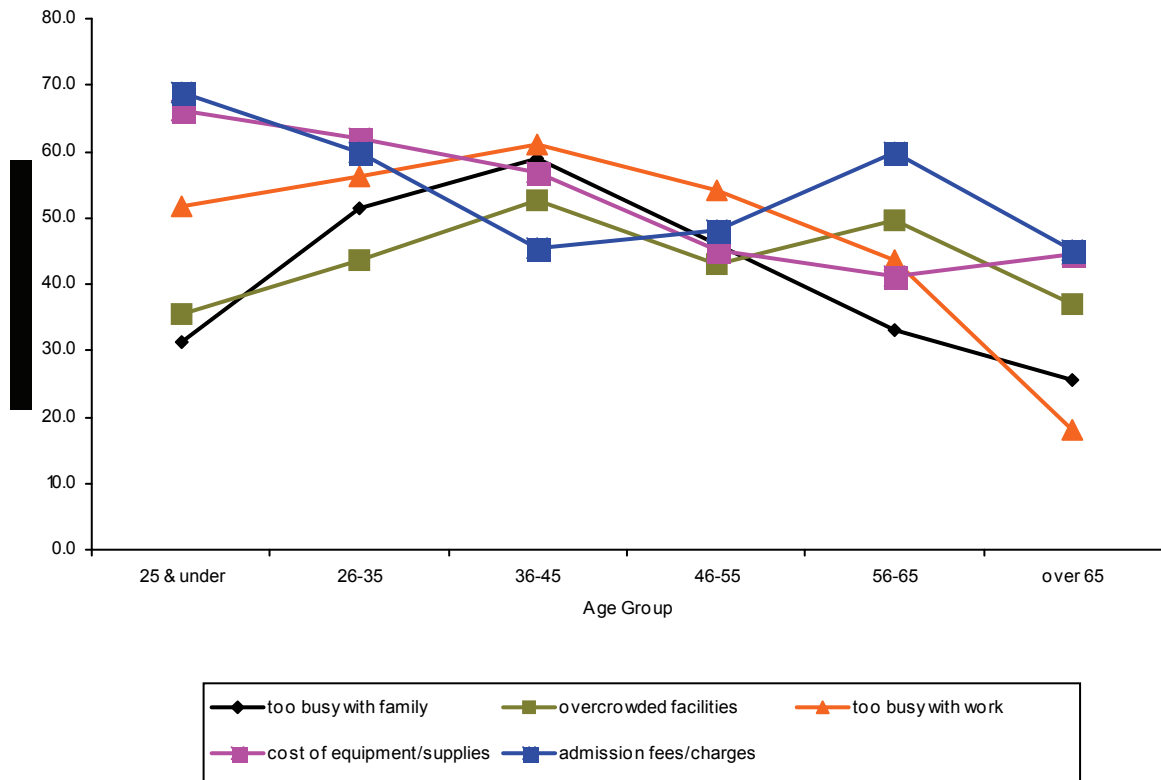


Chart 10 examines the five leading constraints by age groups. For three constraints – overcrowded facilities, too busy with work and too busy with family – the levels of importance increase with age until the 36 to 45 group is reached. After this point, the importance of these factors begins to decline, although for overcrowded facilities, the importance continues to increase again to age 65 before again declining.

Chart 10
Five Most Important Constraints to Participation By Age Group



The economic constraints of ‘admission fees and charges’ and ‘cost of equipment and supplies’ become less important as age increases until age 45, in the case of admission fees and charges, and to 65 for the cost of equipment and supplies.

The relative importance of the different possible constraints to various age-defined life cycle stages is summarized by the rankings shown in Table 6. This summary uses the following typology:

- 18 to 29 refers to young adults, less likely to have immediate family concerns
- 30 to 54 is when adults can be expected to be raising children
- 55 to 65, the ‘empty-nester’ years when children have left home and adults can spend more time on themselves
- over 65, the senior years when more leisure time becomes available and work becomes less of a factor.

Table 6
Importance of Constraints By Age

	Life Cycle Age Category (years)							
	18-29		30-54		55-65		>65	
	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>
Cost of equipment/supplies	63	2	56	2	43	2	44	2
Admission fees/charges	66	1	54	3	49	1	46	1
Too busy with work	54	3	59	1	42	3	24	11
Too busy with family	39	5	54	3	33	5	28	9
Overcrowded facilities	41	4	46	5	9	13	38	3
Poorly maintained facilities	32	8	36	6	40	4	36	5
No opportunity near home	35	7	32	7	25	6	31	8
Don't know where to go	37	6	23	8	13	11	23	12
Cost of transportation	25	9	23	8	22	7	34	6
Facility not physically convenient to use	15	11	16	10	17	9	27	10
Lack of physical abilities	10	12	12	11	20	8	37	4
Lack of transportation	18	10	12	11	10	12	22	13
Physically unable to participate	3	14	8	13	16	10	33	7
Not at ease in social situations	10	12	7	14	7	14	14	14

For young adults (18 to 29), the economic factors of 'cost of equipment, materials and supplies' and 'admission fees and charges' rank as the leading constraints. Being 'too busy with work' and 'too busy with family' become more important constraints to those between the ages of 30 and 54, while for those over the age of 65 the 'admission fees and charges' and 'cost of equipment, materials and supplies' ranks first and second, respectively.

Those in the 55 to 65 age group give most importance to 'admission fees and charges', followed by 'cost of equipment, materials and supplies', and 'too busy with work'. That 'too busy with work' ranks third for this group after being first for the 30 to 54 group begins to demonstrate the influence of retirement on those between the ages of 55 and 65. The 55 to 65 group also give more importance to 'poorly maintained facilities' which they rank fourth compared to its eighth place ranking by those in the 18 to 29 group.

The data also shows that seniors (over 65) place more importance on constraints such as 'being physically unable to take part' and 'facilities not physically convenient to use' compared to other age groups. This finding presents specific challenges for recreation practitioners and facility providers in making facilities accessible at a time when the population is aging.

The results of the *Alberta Recreation Survey* provide empirical evidence that supports the findings from research into constraints conducted elsewhere. Alexandris and Carroll (1997) found that the motivation to participate decreases as age increases. They also recognize that the true relationship between perceptions of constraints and participation in recreation continues to be both complex and unclear (Alexandris and Carroll, 1997). Inconsistencies exist for reasons linking lack of participation with socio-demographic variables (Havitz and Dimanche, 1999).

Stage of the life cycle is influential. Personal constraints increase with age and being married with a family means increased importance of time and family constraints (Alexandris and Carroll, 1997). After children have grown up family constraints decline in importance but adults between 45 and 65 years tend to report being constrained by a lack of knowledge and time, whereas time is less of a constraint for 18-25 year olds (Alexandris and Carroll, 1997).

McGuire and Norman (2005) argue that constraints to participation may be a good thing as we age. Their position is that participation may reflect how a person feels based on a personal self-assessment of health, for example, and that this is more influential than a person's actual age. So it is a change in choice to match personal interpretations of life-stage and capabilities that affects participation.

Specific distinctions have been found for students and women. Research has found that students are somewhat less constrained and more interested in taking part in activities (Alexandris and Carroll, 1997). Women have been found to be more likely to be constrained by inter-personal factors such as shyness, lack of skills, and lack of knowledge as well as financial factors (Alexandris and Carroll, 1997; Tsai and Coleman, 1999).

Conclusions

Age and gender are both significant indicators of recreation preferences and the motivations and constraints that affect participation. This *A Look At Leisure* bulletin has examined how these factors affect participation, preferences for activities, and the motivations and constraints that influence participation. The report also identifies how age groups between genders have specific interests and that the findings of the *Alberta Recreation Survey*, are consistent with trends found elsewhere.

The results of the *Alberta Recreation Survey* demonstrate the popularity of walking and the value Albertans place on this activity as a means of contributing to their health and fitness goals, and that recreation is a means of escape from everyday stresses. While females are slightly more likely than males to select this activity as a favourite, males still demonstrate a desire to be active and express this through golf and other activities that include a competitive dimension. Females seek activities that are more social and family oriented. Some activities, however, such as camping and jogging/running are equally popular among males and females, especially those in older age groups, demonstrating a willingness among Albertans to keep active.

Such willingness can be linked to the Baby Boom generation that is now beginning to enter its senior years. The value they place on being active and staying healthy is expected to increase demand for recreation activities of all types in the next 25 years. Taking part in recreation 'for pleasure', 'to relax' and 'for health and exercise' will continue to be the leading motivations, as will the life cycle stages we pass through from relatively carefree but economically-challenged young adult years, to the family years and into the empty-nest years when older adults begin to re-find their interest in an assortment of recreation and leisure pursuits. Recreation as a means to spend time away from our every-day routines will continue to be a critical tool to help us manage our lifestyles in the future.

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