

A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 9

A LOOK AT
SOCIAL SETTINGS
IN RECREATION

This is the ninth bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks which presents results from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. This issue provides information about the social aspects of leisure, and the social settings which are important to recreation participants.



Harry, call the children, dinner is ready

Alberta

RECREATION AND PARKS

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that most people are interested in being with others while participating in recreation activities (1, 2). They often participate in activities as much for the social aspect (eg. enjoying companions) as for other reasons (eg. exercise, learning, etc.) As well, people participate in recreation activities in various types of social groups or social settings. A number of different social settings were examined to determine their importance to Albertans for their recreation. Awareness of these social settings may help practitioners consider the kinds of social groups that take part in recreation programs and some of the ways to enhance the recreation experience of these groups. Some agencies organize recreation activities and programs for their clients. As well, people may plan and arrange recreation activities by themselves or with family or friends. The study also asked people how much they depended on these agencies and groups to organize their recreation activities. The responses to the following questions are examined in this bulletin:

5. (a) Participation in recreational different social settings. Do you participate in recreational activities in any of the following social setting? (check all that apply)

(b) How important are each of the following social settings for your recreation? (Check one for each social setting)

- by yourself
- with your friends.....
- with members of your family
- with you, fellow workers
- with your church group
- other (describe)___

- by yourself
- with your fronds
- with members of your family
- with your fellow workers
- with your church group
- Other (describe)

• How much do you depend on the following to organize your recreational activities? (Check one box per line)

Not at all somewhat A great deal

- Service groups of other community organizations
- Municipal parks and recreation departments Of boards.....
- Schools, universities or colleges -..
- Yourself.....
- Your family.....
- Your friends.....
- Commercial facilities.....
- Private clubs.....
- Your employer.....

Some of the major findings based on the survey results, include:

- o Over 90 percent of respondents reported that they participated in recreation activities with family or with friends. Most also considered these groups to be "important" social settings for their recreation.
- o Over three-quarters of the people indicated they participated in recreation activities by themselves. However, only one-quarter found participating alone to be an "important" social setting for their recreation.
- o Different social settings were important to different people. For example, the family was more likely to be important to people 35 to 44 years of age, and to those married with children. Friends, fellow workers, and "oneself" were more important to single, young adults.
- o The majority of respondents relied on themselves to organize their recreation activities. Other key influences were members of the family and friends.

The first section of the bulletin will look at recreation participation in various social settings, and the importance of these social settings to respondents. The characteristics of people most likely to favour particular social settings are examined in the second section. The third section will examine people's dependence on various agencies and social groups for the organization of recreational activities. The final section presents some implications of the findings for recreation practitioners.



PARTICIPATION AND
IMPORTANCE OF
SOCIAL SETTINGS

The survey looked at whether or not people participated in recreation activities in five social settings. (Table 1).

TABLE 1 RECREATION PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

	<u>Yes %</u>	<u>No %</u>
With friends	94 91	6
With members of family	78 58	9
By yourself	25	22 42 75
With fellow workers		
With church group		

The respondents were also asked to indicate the importance of these social settings for their recreation (Table 2).

TABLE 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SETTINGS FOR RECREATION

	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
With members of family	72	22 40 44 44	6 6
With friends	54	23	31 42 65
By yourself	25		
With fellow workers	14		
With church group	12		

The findings in Tables 1 and 2 show some interesting patterns. Over 90% of the respondents participated with family or with friends during their recreation (Table 1). In addition, most also found these social settings to be "important" for their recreation (Table 2)



A different pattern was found with the social setting "by yourself". Table 1 indicated that over three-quarters of the respondents participate in recreation activities by themselves. However, when asked how important this social setting was for their recreation, only one quarter of the respondents found participating alone to be "important". This was considerably fewer than those who found family (72%) or friends (54%) to be "important" social settings for recreation. Fewer respondents participated with fellow workers (58%) or with church groups (25%) than with the other social settings (Table 1). They were also least likely to find these social settings "important" for their recreation (Table 2).

The results indicate that the majority of Albertans participate in recreation with family or friends and consider these social groups to be important aspects of their recreation. In addition, the findings suggest that people may actually be participating alone when they would prefer to be with others (i.e. family or friends).

The finding that family and friends are the most important social settings for recreation participation is consistent with previous studies (3). These personal groups are considered to be the main social influence in shaping leisure patterns. It has also been found that satisfaction associated with "things done with family and friends" is an important leisure factor related to overall quality of life (4).

Much of the literature has focussed on the role of the family as a leisure setting. Kelly (3) reported that about 60% of recreational and cultural activities were done with family members. He also found that the family was an important setting for learning recreation behaviour - about two-thirds of people's recreation activities had been started with other members of the family.



SOCIAL SETTINGS
AND RESPONDENT
CHARACTERISTICS

The results suggest that people are likely to find certain social settings to be more important for their recreation at different stages of their lives. Age, marital status and parenthood are factors that provide information about people's life cycle stages.

For example, it was found that the family is important as a recreation social setting for respondents in the mid-adult age category (35 to 44 years), who are married, with children and are home owners. On the other hand, participation by oneself, with friends, and with fellow workers were considered more important to younger, single persons and to those who were more mobile residents (eg. renters and apartment dwellers). Those likely to find church groups important were older respondents (especially senior citizens), those with larger families, and those more permanently settled.

These life-cycle findings are similar to those reported by other researchers. Kelly (3) found that preferred social settings were clearly related to marital status and parenthood. Unmarried people did most of their recreation alone or with friends. Those married without children had their spouse as their main leisure companion. For parents, the family became the dominant social setting for leisure.

Other findings from the survey are also of interest. For example, many Albertans living on farms or acreages report that their families and church groups were particularly important settings for their recreation. Also, church groups were important to many with lower incomes and education.



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WHO IS IMPORTANT
FOR ORGANIZING
RECREATION ACTIVITIES?

A variety of social groups and agencies may be used by people to organize their recreational activities. The survey results reported in Table 3 show that most people rely on themselves to arrange their recreation activities. Family members and friends are also important influences in organizing recreation.

TABLE 3 WHO IS IMPORTANT FOR ORGANIZING RECREATION ACTIVITIES?

	A GreatDeal % _____	Somewhat %	Not At All %
Self	78	17	5
Members of family	47	40	13
Friends	30	60	10
Municipal agencies	14	44	42
Commercial facilities	8	38	54
Service clubs	8	33	59
Private club	8	28	64
Schools, universities, colleges	7	32	61
Employers	2	16	82

Fewer people depend on formal agencies and clubs to organize their activities. However, those who did, relied more on municipal recreation departments than on the other types of public, non-profit, or private sector agencies.

It is likely that many people use public and private agencies as settings for their recreation but actually organize their activities themselves or with their family or friends.



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IMPLICATIONS

What do the findings about social settings mean for the recreation practitioner? The survey results suggested that most Albertans find social interaction with family and friendship groups to be an integral part of their recreation. This may have important implications for recreation delivery. Do you provide opportunities that are directed to these types of groups in your recreation programs? Are your facilities designed in such a way to encourage participation by these groups?

Many people reported that they participated in recreation by themselves. However, respondents generally did not feel that participating alone was an important social setting for their recreation. This suggests that there may be barriers preventing people from participating in recreation activities with preferred social groups such as family or friends. Results reported in an earlier bulletin suggest that "lack of others to participate with" is a definite barrier to recreation participation for many Albertans (Bulletin No. 5 - Barriers to Participation). Have you considered this as a potential barrier to participation in your recreation programs? What are some of the ways you can encourage individuals to participate with others when they attend programs or use facilities? Promotion of a "buddy system" in recreation programs might be one way of encouraging participation with others.

Recent research has stressed that social interaction is often an essential part of the leisure experience. In fact, the social aspect of leisure appears to be one of the main reasons for recreation participation. Crandall (2) found that it was as important to people as concerns about the quality of sports and recreation facilities. His results suggest that supporting and encouraging social interaction should be an important goal of the recreation practitioner.



Do you consider the social role of leisure when designing your recreation programs? Certain activities provide more social opportunities than others. People might be interested in physical fitness, or learning certain skills, but socializing might also be an important motivation for participating. What are the personal needs that are met by the social aspects of leisure? Being with others, meeting new people, cooperation, and feedback about social skills are important factors. Do you try to determine if these needs are important to your recreation clients? A needs assessment survey of the community might indicate if people would prefer more social opportunities in recreation programs and activities. What ways can you facilitate social interaction in your programs? As an example, you might encourage class projects which involve two or more people in a group, or you could provide a social "nutrition" break at the end of exercise classes.

The survey results indicate that the majority of people participate in leisure activities with family members and also find them to be the most important social group for their recreation. Recently, attention has been focussed on the family as a social setting for recreation. Couchman (5) has thrown out a challenge to the recreation practitioner. He notes that it is important to encourage and program for more active participation by family units, since much family recreation is sedentary at present. "Together ... is better" is the Canadian Parks/Recreation Association's (6) program to encourage people to spend quality time together with their "family". Are you familiar with this program and its manual for family recreation? How can you make use of this theme in your programming?

The study results also indicate that different social settings are important for people at different stages of their lives. This suggests that people may choose to recreate in groups that have lifestyle interests similar to their own. These social groups in turn, may obtain different meanings and satisfactions from similar recreation settings and activities (1). For example, a group of young single friends might welcome a camping weekend as a way of getting away from the family and an opportunity to meet and socialize with other young people.

In contrast, a family might view camping as a means of enjoying one another's company and being in pleasant natural surroundings. These variations point out the importance of understanding the needs of various social groups when they participate in recreation activities. This information could then help practitioners to select and shape programs to meet these diverse needs.

Finally, the study findings point out that most people depend primarily on themselves or their social circles of family and friends to organize recreation. Many, however, depend to some extent on municipal recreation departments to organize activities. It may therefore be important to include flexible opportunities for those who prefer to organize their own activities, in addition to more structured recreation programs.

It is the challenge of the recreation practitioner to offer a variety of opportunities which will best meet the recreational needs of people with different social orientations. Understanding and considering the social aspect of recreation is a basic requirement in achieving this goal.

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FUTURE ISSUES
AND REPORTS

RECREATION ORGANIZATIONS - Which organizations do Algerians use most frequently for their recreation?

SUMMARY ISSUE - Some of the major trends found in the results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation.

In the near future we will be publishing the technical report A Study of Voluntarism In Recreation. This report will be provided to major libraries and universities in Alberta. We will also be publishing the Executive Summary of the report, which will be available upon request to those who wish to obtain more information than was provided in the seventh A Look at Leisure bulletin. Those who desire further details are advised to refer to the full technical report.

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