

A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 14

CHOOSING RECREATION ACTIVITIES

This is the fourteenth bulletin in a series, published by Alberta Recreation and Parks, which presents results from general recreation surveys conducted by the department. The discussion focuses on findings of the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, and looks at recently started recreation activities, reasons or motivations for participation, and expenditures for these activities.



The information in this bulletin is based on responses to the following questions in the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*:

3. (a) Is there any leisure time activity that **YOU** have **STARTED** to participate in **REGULARLY** over the **LAST 12 MONTHS**? (This does not need to be a new activity; it may be something you did years ago, but only recently took up again.)

Yes No If **NO**, please go to question 4, page 9.

If **YES**, please specify which leisure activity you have started to participate in. (If there is more than one activity that you have started to participate in regularly over the **LAST 12 MONTHS**, please list the activity that you participated in **MOST OFTEN**.)

Name **ONE** activity only. _____

- (b) People have many reasons for participating in leisure activities. We would like to know your reasons for starting or re-starting to participate in this activity during the past 12 months.

Based on the activity you have started or re-started, as listed above in part 3(a), how **IMPORTANT** are **EACH** of the following reasons for participation to you? (Please circle **ONE** number for **EACH** reason.)

- (c) You may wish to advise us of the money you spent on participating in this activity.

Approximately how much money did **YOU** spend on the leisure time activity you started or re-started to participate in over the past 12 months. (Please check **ONE** box for **EACH** category.)

HIGHLIGHTS

Major findings from the 1984 survey which are discussed in this issue include the following:

- Almost one-half of those answering the survey had started (or re-started) a new recreation activity in the previous year.
- Physical fitness/aerobics activities, swimming, walking for pleasure, bicycling, and golf were the specific activities started by the highest numbers of respondents.
- Similar to findings of the 1981 survey, the most important reasons for participating in recreation activities were physical health or exercise, relaxation, an alternative to work, socializing, and learning new skills.
- Expenditures on new activities were highest for camping, mechanized outdoor pursuits, and downhill skiing.



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>

STARTING NEW ACTIVITIES

Close to one-half of the people answering the survey (i.e., the respondents) had started a new recreational activity in the past year, or had re-started an activity in which they had participated before. The likelihood of participating in a new activity varied among the respondents. Young adults, under 25 years of age, were twice as likely as adults over 45 years of age to indicate a new activity. Involvement in a new activity was also more common among single persons and members of single parent families, than those from other types of households, and tended to increase as education level increased.

ACTIVITY CHOICES

Respondents were asked to name the activity which they had started in the previous year. In total, 65 different pursuits were identified by the respondents. The activities which were mentioned most frequently were:

1. Physical fitness/ aerobics
2. Swimming
3. Walking for pleasure
4. Bicycling
5. Golf
6. Body building/ weight lifting
7. Racquetball/squash
8. Bowling
9. Creative activities
(such as painting, drama, music)
10. Jogging/running.

The fact that many people started these activities in the previous year does not necessarily mean that the activities have increased in overall participation levels. There may be a turnover of participants, with some dropping out while others are newly recruited. However, as reported in *A Look at Leisure* Bulletin No. 13, the survey results indicate a general increase in participation from 1981 to 1984 for several of these activities, including swimming, bicycling, and golf. Increased participation in physical fitness and aerobics activities, racquetball, and creative activities was also apparent.

Most of the 65 activities were mentioned by a relatively small number of respondents. It was, therefore,



necessary to group these activities into categories for a more meaningful analysis. The eight categories are indicated in Table 1, and examples of the activities included in each category are provided in the chart. It was possible to look at three activities (physical fitness/ aerobics, swimming, and golf) on an individual basis since they were mentioned frequently by respondents.

The most commonly started activity category was the exercise-oriented grouping, which was mentioned by 33 percent of the people who had started a new activity. This was followed by creative-cultural, social and passive activities (14%), mechanized and extractive outdoor pursuits (12%), team sports (12%), physical fitness/aerobics (11%), swimming (6%), and golf (5%). The remaining category consisted of non-mechanized outdoor pursuits (4% of respondents).

The profile information presented in Table 1 also indicates how activity choices vary with socio-demographic characteristics. For example, participants in team sports were most likely to be males, and people under 35 years of age, while preferences for creative-cultural, social and passive activities were most frequently expressed by females, and tended to increase with age. The idea that participation in activities varies with socio-demographic characteristics was developed in more detail in a previous *A Look at Leisure* Bulletin (No. 13, Participation Patterns).

In addition to the role of socio-demographic characteristics, there are many factors which influence an individual's selection of recreation activities. These include the availability of recreation opportunities, as well as awareness of these opportunities. Costs, such as equipment expenditures, may also affect activity choices. Studies have found that the social influences of family and friends are important in shaping leisure choices, and that skills learned at a young age may affect the selection of recreation activities in adulthood (e.g., West, 1984).



TABLE 1 Activity Category Profiles

1. Exercise-Oriented Activities (33%)*

Examples: tennis, bicycling, ice skating, body building
Profile: slightly more likely for males than females, and participation declined with increasing age; chosen more often by those with higher education levels, and by residents of large urban centres.
Main Reasons: motivated by physical health and exercise, relaxation, an alternative to work, socializing, and learning skills.

2. Creative-Cultural, Social, and Passive (14%)

Examples: dance, hobbies, watching T.V., attend courses
Profile: preference expressed by females, and those living in households with no children; marked increase in participation as age increases.
Main Reasons: relaxation, learning new skills and abilities, using skills and talents, being creative, alternative to work.

3. Mechanized and

Extractive Outdoor Activities (12%)

Examples: snowmobiling, downhill skiing, fishing, hunting
Profile: activities more likely to be chosen by males, and respondents in the mid-income range; participation quite consistent across all age levels, but declined over 65 years of age.
Main Reasons: relaxation, enjoying nature, doing something different from work, socializing, and excitement.

4. Team Sports (12%)

Examples: baseball, curling, basketball, ice hockey
Profile: three times as likely for males as for females; participants tended to be under 35 years of age.
Main Reasons: physical health or exercise, doing things with friends, relaxation, alternative to work, skill development.

5. Physical Fitness, Aerobics (11%)

Profile: five times as likely to be selected by females as by males; preferred by those under 35 years of age, members of single parent families, and those having a post-secondary level of education.
Main Reasons: physical health or exercise, relaxation, learning new skills and abilities, an alternative to work, and socializing.

6. Swimming (6%)

Profile: participation similar across all age groups and all types of households; slightly more likely to be started by females than by males.
Main Reasons: physical health or exercise, relaxation, learning new skills and abilities, socializing, enjoying nature.

7. Golf (5%)

Profile: twice as likely to be started by males than females; no socio-economic differences.
Main Reasons: relaxation, socializing, an alternative to work, exercise, learning new skills.

8. Non-Mechanized Outdoor Activities (4%)

Examples: backpacking, canoeing, cross-country skiing
Profile: starting participation peaked in the mid-adult years (35 to 44 years), and was linked with higher education levels.
Main Reasons: enjoyment of nature, physical health or exercise, relaxation, socializing, learning new skills.

* Percentage of respondents who had started a new activity.



REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Personal motivations also play a major role in decisions about the use of leisure. Looking at motivations helps to explain "why" people participate in activities, and what personal needs influence their leisure choices. Researchers believe that leisure may satisfy needs which are not satisfied in other situations, such as work or daily routine activities. Individuals are attracted to recreation activities which meet their various needs, and are likely to be satisfied if their personal needs are met. Knowing why people participate helps practitioners to understand what people desire in their recreation activities, and what qualities in programs attract and satisfy participants.

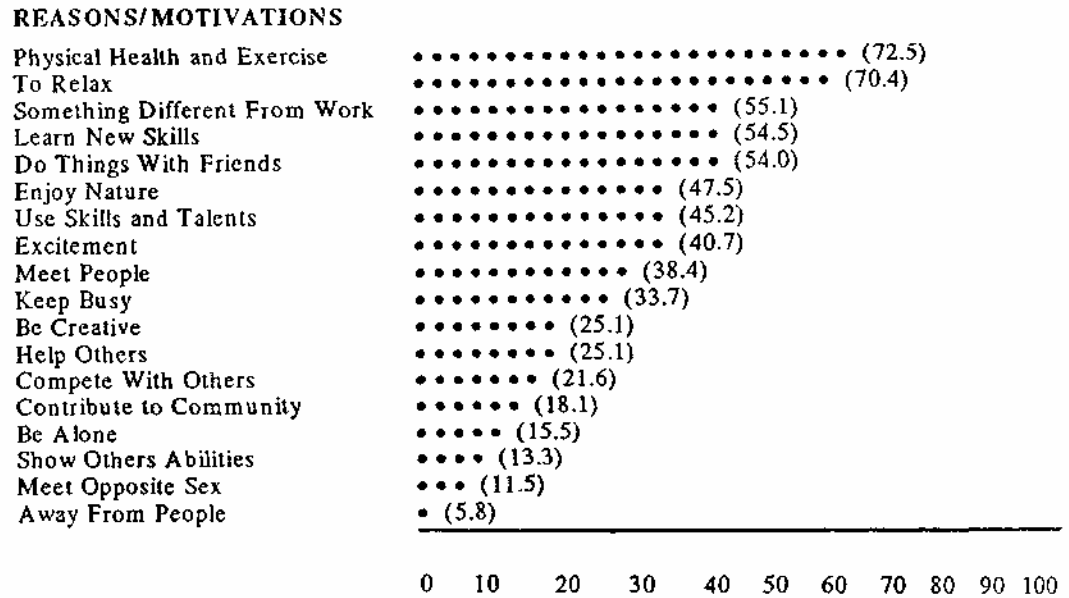
The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* examined the importance of eighteen reasons or motivations for participation in recreation activities. Figure 1 shows the percentages of respondents who felt that each reason was important in their choice of a recreation activity. Physical health or exercise, and relaxation, were important motivations for the majority of respondents. Other reasons for participation which ranked highly were: doing something different from work, socializing with friends, and learning new skills and abilities. Reasons such as showing accomplishments to others, meeting people of the opposite sex, and being away from the family, were important to fewer people.

The four highest ranked motivations identified in the 1984 survey were also rated highly in the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. In addition, the 1981 survey found that pleasure and pleasant surroundings were important to many people. There is also support for the primary importance of motivations such as physical health and exercise, relaxation, socializing, and skill development, from leisure research in other settings (e.g., Allen and Donnelly, 1985).



FIGURE 1

IMPORTANCE OF REASONS FOR STARTING PARTICIPATION IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES



PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS CONSIDERING REASON TO BE IMPORTANT

Different types of activities vary in the extent to which they satisfy different needs. People have different reasons for participating, and their motivations influence the type of recreation activities they choose. The most important motivations for participation in each of the eight activity groupings are summarized in Table 1. Relaxation was rated highly across all activity groupings. Exercise-oriented activities, team sports, fitness/aerobics, and golf were quite similar in the types of motivations expressed by respondents.

The importance of motivations also varies with the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The survey results show that reasons for participation may be different at various stages of life. For example: excitement", competition, and learning new skills are among the important motivations for young adults, whereas altruistic reasons, such as helping others and contributing to the community are more significant for adults in the senior age categories. Both relaxation and



enjoyment of nature increase in importance as age increases.

There are also differences between males and females in their reasons for choosing recreation activities. Males are more likely than females to consider excitement and competition to be important. Reasons which tend to be rated more highly by women included health and exercise, socializing, keeping busy, being creative, and being away from the family.

The survey results, and findings from other studies, indicate that personal motivations are important in influencing recreation participation and choice of recreation activities. The results also show that the importance of motivations may vary for different recreation participants, and at different stages of life. Understanding why people participate is useful in explaining leisure behaviour, and in helping practitioners provide participants with appropriate activities for their needs.

EXPENDITURES ON NEW ACTIVITIES

The 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* looked at respondents' expenditures on recently started activities. The expenditures reported in this section therefore reflect spending on new recreation activities. The percentage of the average dollar spent for each of four expense categories is shown in Table 2. Although the data are not perfectly comparable, the 1984 findings are very similar to the expenditures *on favorite* recreation activities, reported for the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.

The average amount which respondents spent during the previous year on a new recreation activity was \$547. This consisted of equipment costs, which averaged \$169 per year, followed by travel costs (\$147), miscellaneous costs (\$126), and membership and entrance fees (\$105).

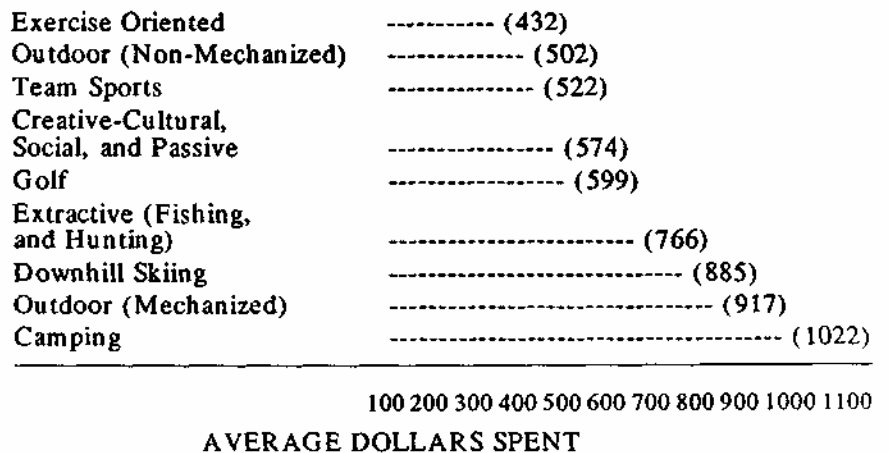


TABLE 2
Breakdown of Expenditures on New
Recreation Activities (1984) and
Favorite Activities (1981)

	Percent	
	1984	1981
Equipment costs	31	31
Travel costs	27	31
Other (meals, accommodation, etc.)	23	23
Membership, entrance fees	19	15

Expenditures varied considerably with the types of activities started by respondents. The information presented in Figure 2 shows that total expenses were highest for camping, mechanized outdoor activities, downhill skiing, and extractive pursuits (such as hunting and fishing). These activities are all resource-based, outdoor pursuits, and often involve a great deal of travel. Expenses were lowest for exercise-oriented activities, and non-mechanized outdoor pursuits.

FIGURE 2
**Average Dollars Spent on New
Recreation Activities in Previous Year**



Some expenses were particularly important for certain types of new activities. Equipment expenditures were highest for mechanized outdoor pursuits, camping, and golf, while travel expenditures were highest for extractive (fishing and hunting) pursuits, and camping. Membership fees tended to be particularly important for golf, exercise-oriented activities, and team sports.

As in the 1981 survey, income was identified as an important influence in leisure spending. Age was also a factor. The average amount spent on new recreation activities tended to increase gradually with age, up to 64 years, and then declined for the senior age group. Males reported higher levels of expenditure than did females.

IMPLICATIONS

The survey results show that people have many different reasons for participating in recreation activities. By being aware of these reasons, practitioners can shape programs to meet the needs and goals of participants, and identify program needs which are not being met with existing offerings. As practitioners, do you try to find out what motivates people to participate in your programs? One way of doing this would be to include a question on registration forms, asking clients to indicate their main reasons for participating. Do you offer opportunities for clients to talk to instructors in order to find out about program content before they register? "Open house" events during main registration times might help potential clients explore programs, and learn about new program offerings. Does your advertising provide an accurate picture of program content, to help potential clients make better decisions about their activity choices? People may have several reasons for participating. Do you try to design program content to meet a variety of needs, such as skill development, meeting new people, and relaxation?

The findings indicate that motivations may vary considerably among different types of participants, such as people of different ages. Are you able to help your clients identify their leisure needs, and to assist them in selecting the most appropriate activities to meet their goals?

The survey results show that older adults are not as likely as younger people to start a new activity. Should more



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>

advertising be directed toward this group in order to inform them about suitable programs? How can you adapt your programs to make them more attractive to older adults?

By trying to understand the leisure needs of clients, recreation practitioners will be better prepared to achieve the important goal of client satisfaction. This will help to improve the effectiveness of recreation service delivery in communities, and ensure on-going support for programs.

REFERENCES

Allen, L. R. and M. Donnelly. 1985. *An Analysis of the Social Unit of Participation and the Perceived Psychological Outcomes Associated with Most Enjoyable Recreation Activities* **Leisure Sciences**, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 421-441.

Crandall, Rick. 1980. *Motivations for Leisure* **Journal of Leisure Research**, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 45-54.

Hawes, Douglass K. 1978. *Satisfactions Derived from Leisure-Time Pursuits: An Exploratory Nationwide Survey.* **Journal of Leisure Research**, Vol.10, No. 4, pp. 247-264.

Osgood, N. J. and Howe, C. Z. 1984. *Psychological Aspects of Leisure: A Life Cycle Developmental Perspective* **Society and Leisure**, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.175-193.

West, Patrick. 1984. *Status Differences and Interpersonal Influence in the Adoption of Outdoor Recreation Activities* **Journal of Leisure Research**, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp.350-354.



THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue in the *A Look at Leisure* series will look at the activities people have stopped participating in and the reasons why they stopped participating.

INFORMATION

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

Janet Fletcher
Recreation Planner
Recreation Development Division
Alberta Recreation and Parks
Standard Life Building
10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3N4
Phone: (403) 427-4685

Computers are beginning to play an important role in the recreation field. If you are currently using a computer in connection with your recreation job, we would like to hear from you to find out how you are using the computer. Please contact me at the above address.

J.F.



Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>