

A Look at Leisure

March 2004

No. 48

Barriers to Participation – Trends and Demographic Influences

Introduction

The Alberta Recreation Survey has been conducted every four years since 1981. The six surveys in the series provide a wealth of data about how Albertans participate in recreation. This bulletin takes the data from each survey and presents a summary of trends among barriers, or constraints, that Albertans believe restrict their participation, and compares these to the demographic characteristics of the population. The findings from the analysis can help practitioners more clearly understand how demographic changes within the population have influenced and might further influence the delivery of recreation opportunities.

In 2000, the Alberta Recreation Survey investigated 14 potential barriers to participation. In each of the surveys conducted since 1981, respondents were qualified to answer the question if they had also indicated that they were interested in starting a new activity on a regular basis. The question was phrased to ask about the importance of each of the 14 factors to preventing their participation in this new activity. How respondents indicated the relative importance of each item has changed somewhat over the years – from a 3-point rating scale in 1981 to a 5-point scale in 1984 and since 1988 a 4-point scale has been used.

It must also be noted that the 1984 survey asked about barriers only among those respondents who reported ending their participation in an activity¹. As a result, direct comparisons of response rates between some years are difficult. For the most part, this bulletin relies on analysis using the ratings assigned to the two highest rating categories that refer to ‘important’ or ‘very important’ opinions.

Major findings about barriers to participation that are evident from the 2000 survey include:

- the costs for admission fees and equipment and supplies are the most important barriers,

¹ The 1984 barriers question was worded as follows: “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?” If the answer was “Yes”, respondents were then asked to name the activity and rate the various barriers on a scale.

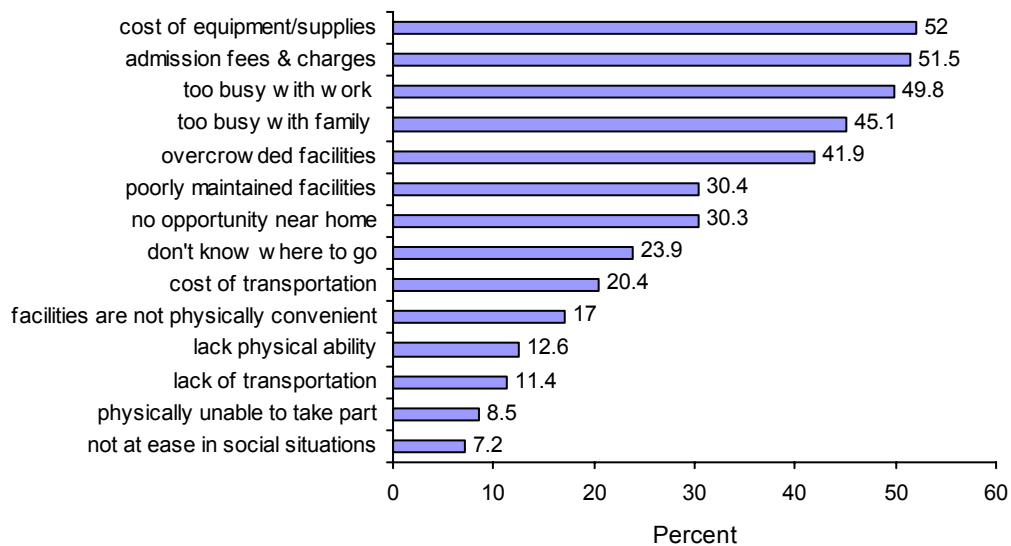
- economic barriers have replaced time commitments associated with work and family as the leading barriers,
- there is evidence of the growing importance of the quality of facility maintenance as a limitation on participation,
- other barriers have maintained their relative order in 2000 compared to previous Alberta Recreation Surveys,
- demographic factors affect the importance of barriers with seniors giving the most importance to access issues while young adults give more importance to cost factors.

In the analysis that follows, we have focused on the rank order of barriers. However, in some cases, the actual percentage scores may also be informative and the reader is encouraged to consider these as well.

Overview of Barriers in 2000

Approximately half of respondents identified the cost of recreation equipment, materials and supplies, admission fees and program charges, and work commitments as the main barriers that limit their participation in recreational activities (Figure 1). More than two-fifths of respondents felt that their participation was restricted by family commitments and overcrowded facilities. Close to one-third of respondents reported that they have found that facilities are poorly maintained or that there is no opportunity near their home. The remaining potential barriers are important to less than one-quarter of Albertans.

Figure 1
Barriers to Participation, 2000



Trends in the Influence of Barriers

Table 1 compares the percentage of respondents reporting the importance of up to 15 potential barriers that have been investigated by the Alberta Recreation Survey since 1981, and the respective rank order found for each survey. This comparison produces some interesting trends, most notably the rise in importance of economic factors over time commitments.

The highest ranking barrier from the most recent survey in 2000 is the cost of recreation equipment, materials and supplies. This has ranked as low as 8th in 1984 (possibly due to the different question wording used in 1984) but became the most important barrier in 1988, and has remained the primary barrier in each of the subsequent surveys.

Another economic barrier is the fees charged for admission or program registration. This item has seen a steady increase in importance since 1981 when it ranked 7th. By 1984 it was ranked 4th in importance, holding this position until 1992 when it became the 3rd highest ranked barrier. By 1996, admission fees and program charges were the 2nd most important barrier to participation. These findings provide a strong indication of the potential impact of user fees and the increasing limitation on participation.

Commitments at work and with family have consistently been among the top five barriers. Work commitments ranked first or second between 1981 and 1992 but slipped to 3rd in 1996 as the importance of admission fees increased. By contrast, family commitments have been slightly less important since 1984 but have moved from the 5th ranked factor in 1988 to 4th in 2000, a possible reflection of the baby-boom generation having their own families.

Outside of the top five barriers, the remainder that have been tested between 1981 and 2000 have largely maintained their relative importance over the years. Of note, however, is the sixth place ranking of the barrier 'poorly maintained facilities' in the 2000 survey. Since 1984, this item has risen from 13th rank in 1984 to 8th in each of the surveys conducted in the 1990s. In the 2000 survey, this item ranks as the 6th most important factor. This steady rise in importance suggests that aging infrastructure may have an affect on Albertans' desire to take part in recreation and that capital upgrading may serve to encourage future participation.

Table 1
Trends in the Importance of Barriers to Participation, 1981 to 2000

<u>Year:</u>	1981		1984		1988		1992		1996		2000	
	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank
Cost of equipment/supplies	53.2	6	31.2	8	47.2	1	50.6	1	53.4	1	52.0	1
Admission fees/charges	45.3	7	34.9	4	37.2	4	44.5	3	48.5	2	51.5	2
Too busy with work	71.3	1	59.4	1	43.9	2	47.3	2	47.6	3	49.8	3
Too busy with family	55.8	5	55.2	2	36.9	5	40.3	4	40.0	4	45.1	4
Overcrowded facilities	64.4	2	39.3	3	39.9	3	39.8	5	39.1	5	41.9	5
Poorly maintained facilities	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	17.2	13	28.5	8	25.8	8	27.8	8	30.4	6
No opportunity near home	57.5	4	32.6	7	36.8	6	31.6	7	27.9	7	30.3	7
Don't know where to go	43.1	8	18.5	11	21.0	10	21.2	10	20.2	9	23.9	8
Cost of transportation	26.7	11	22.1	10	23.2	9	23.0	9	19.5	10	20.4	9
Facilities are not physically convenient to use	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	17.0	10
Lack physical ability	21.1	12	18.1	12	7.7	13	9.8	13	9.1	13	12.6	11
Lack of transportation	17.6	13	11.9	14	10.8	12	12.9	12	13.2	12	11.4	12
Physically unable to take part	11.2	15	24.5	9	5.0	15	5.7	15	6.3	14	8.5	13
Not at ease in social situations	29.4	10	10.8	15	7.6	14	6.7	14	6.3	15	7.2	14
Difficulty finding others	58.1	3	34.8	5	32.2	7	31.7	6	31.1	6	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Don't know where to learn	31.8	9	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	17.7	11	17.3	11	18.8	11	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
No artistic/creative abilities	16.8	14	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
No longer interested	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	33.1	6	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>

Notes:

1. the rating scale used for the 1981 survey was 3-point and in 1984 it was 5-point. Since 1988 the rating scale has been 4-point.
2. the 1984 barriers question was asked only of those respondents reporting that they had ceased a recreation activity in the previous 12 months.
3. n/a means not asked.

A Closer Look at Barriers to Participation in 2000

Barriers By Age, 2000

Table 2 compares the relative importance of each of the barriers tested in 2000 to the age of respondents and some notable variances are evident. For young people (18-29), the economic factors of “cost of equipment/supplies” and “admission fees/charges” rank the highest while too busy with family ranks seventh and is replaced among the top 5 items by “no opportunity near home”. By contrast, “too busy with work” and “too busy with family” rank first and second, respectively, for those in the 30-54 age group while economic factors such as fee/charges and the cost of equipment, are of slightly less importance.

Table 2
Importance of Barriers By Age

	Age Category (years)							
	18-29		30-54		55-65		>65	
	%	<i>rank</i>	%	<i>rank</i>	%	<i>rank</i>	%	<i>rank</i>
Cost of equipment/supplies	62.6	1	49.1	3	46.1	2	37.9	2
Admission fees/charges	57.1	2	40.4	5	51.2	1	41.7	1
Too busy with work	48.4	3	55.6	1	38.9	3	11.1	13
Too busy with family	33.0	7	52.2	2	36.3	5	20.4	11
Overcrowded facilities	39.2	5	43.0	4	38.9	4	37.5	3
Poorly maintained facilities	30.2	8	29.4	6	32.8	6	27.3	8
No opportunity near home	39.4	4	28.3	7	22.8	8	34.5	4
Don't know where to go	38.9	6	19.2	8	20.5	10	32.7	5
Cost of transportation	28.2	9	16.0	9	21.8	9	31.6	6
Facility not physically convenient to use	12.2	11	15.9	10	25.0	7	24.1	9
Lack of physical abilities	8.4	12	11.0	11	18.7	11	27.4	7
Lack of transportation	19.3	10	8.8	12	8.3	14	12.7	12
Physically unable to participate	5.0	14	6.9	13	12.6	12	23.4	10
Not at ease in social situations	7.8	13	5.9	14	9.9	13	10.9	14

Seniors show the greatest variation from the rank order of barriers found for the total sample. While admission fees/charges and the cost of equipment/supplies remain the highest rated items, too busy with work and too busy with family rank lower at 13th and 11th, respectively. However, the percentage of seniors reporting admission fees/charges and the cost of equipment as barriers is generally lower than found for young people.

The data also suggest that seniors are more challenged by barriers related to access and knowledge, including “cost of transportation”, “don't know where to go” and “no opportunity near home”. As might be expected, seniors also place more importance on constraints such as not

being physically able to take part and facilities being inconvenient to use, a finding that presents particular challenges for recreation practitioners and facility providers.

Barriers By Gender, 2000

The 2000 survey data show little difference in relative ranking of barriers among males and females (Table 3). Both groups share the same items in the five highest rated barriers. Of note, however, is that the percentage of females identifying barriers tends to be higher than the percentage of males, particularly for the five highest ranked barriers.

Table 3
Barriers by Gender

	Male		Female	
	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>
Cost of equipment/supplies	48.9	1	53.1	1
Admission fees/charges	40.4	5	48.9	3
Too busy with work	47.9	2	52.0	2
Too busy with family	41.4	4	48.8	4
Overcrowded facilities	42.5	3	41.1	5
Poorly maintained facilities	31.5	6	29.3	7
No opportunity near home	27.1	7	32.7	6
Don't know where to go	21.9	8	24.9	8
Cost of transportation	19.4	9	20.7	9
Facility not physically convenient to use	17.5	10	16.5	10
Lack of physical abilities	8.9	11	15.5	11
Lack of transportation	8.5	12	13.5	12
Physically unable to participate	7.7	13	8.9	13
Not at ease in social situations	6.9	14	7.5	14

Barriers By Age & Gender, 2000

A comparison of how the gender of respondents and their age affects the rank of barriers to participation reveals several interesting deviations from the general trend. From Table 4, the cost of equipment, for example, which ranks first among all respondents, is much less important to female seniors than it is for either male seniors, or Albertans in other age groups. Female seniors also place greater importance on facilities being poorly maintained, ranking this fourth compared to ninth for senior men, and facilities not being physically convenient.

Table 4
Barriers By Age

Barriers	Age Group							
	18 – 29		30 – 54		55 – 64		65 and over	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)	% (rank)
Cost of equipment/supplies	65 (1)	62 (1)	46 (3)	52 (3)	48 (1)	43 (2)	43 (1)	30 (7)
Admission fees/charges	52 (2)	60 (2)	37 (5)	44 (4)	48 (1)	53 (1)	41 (2)	42 (1)
Too busy with work	43 (3)	51 (3)	56 (1)	56 (2)	38 (4)	41 (3)	12 (12)	10 (14)
Too busy with family	21 (9)	39 (7)	47 (2)	57 (1)	43 (3)	31 (5)	21 (9)	19 (9)
Overcrowded facilities	37 (4)	41 (6)	45 (4)	42 (5)	37 (5)	40 (4)	35 (4)	41 (2)
Poorly maintained facilities	32 (7)	30 (8)	31 (6)	28 (7)	36 (6)	31 (5)	21 (9)	38 (4)
No opportunity near home	35 (5)	42 (4)	25 (7)	32 (6)	24 (8)	22 (7)	31 (5)	40 (3)
Don't know where to go	33 (6)	42 (5)	18 (8)	20 (8)	24 (9)	21 (8)	30 (6)	36 (5)
Cost of transportation	27 (8)	29 (9)	14 (10)	17 (9)	24 (9)	20 (10)	40 (3)	18 (10)
Facilities not physically convenient to use	12 (11)	12 (11)	16 (9)	16 (10)	33 (7)	18 (11)	18 (11)	33 (6)
Lack of physical abilities	5 (13)	10 (12)	6 (11)	16 (10)	15 (11)	21 (8)	28 (8)	26 (8)
Lack of transportation	20 (10)	19 (10)	6 (11)	11 (12)	7 (14)	10 (13)	9 (13)	17 (12)
Physically unable to participate	3 (14)	6 (13)	6 (11)	8 (13)	10 (13)	15 (12)	29 (7)	13 (13)
Not at ease in social situations	12 (11)	6 (13)	5 (14)	7 (14)	14 (12)	7 (14)	6 (14)	18 (10)

Interestingly, both seniors and those in the youngest age group of 18 to 29, share a view that not knowing where to go is of more importance than it is to other age groups, with females rating this higher than their male counterparts. Those in the 18 to 29 age group also place greater importance on a lack of transportation but there is no difference between males and females.

Other differences are also evident from Table 4. Male seniors, for example, place more importance on the cost of equipment, and the cost of transportation; males in the 55 to 64 age group place more importance than females on facilities not being physically convenient. Lastly, males in the 18 to 29 group rank “not at ease in social situations” higher than females of the same age, whereas female seniors report being more uncomfortable in these situations than male seniors.

The comparisons presented in Table 4 provide useful insights into how program design and delivery can reflect differences not just between but within age groups and knowing this can help practitioners target their strategies to meet specific needs of their customers.

Barriers By Income, 2000

There is little difference in the relative importance of barriers to participation among Albertans with annual household incomes of between \$30,000 and \$70,000 (Table 5). However, there are contrasting differences between those in the higher income groups and those in the lower groups. Those with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 give higher priority to the cost of recreation equipment and admission than those with annual incomes of above \$70,000. Being “too busy with work” and “too busy with family” are more important to households with annual incomes above \$50,000, while “too busy with family” is ranked ninth for those with incomes of under \$30,000². It is also apparent that the cost of transportation serves as more of a barrier for those households with less than \$30,000 annual income than for those in other income groups.

**Table 5
Barriers by Annual Household Income**

	Income Category (\$000s)											
	<10		10-30		30-50		50-70		70-90		>90	
	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>rank</u>
Cost of equipment/supplies	76.7	1	65.3	1	51.0	1	52.7	2	44.5	3	34.2	4
Admission fees/charges	70.0	2	57.2	2	48.1	2	47.8	4	36.1	5	27.7	6
Too busy with work	55.2	3	33.5	7	42.0	3	53.6	1	55.0	1	60.0	1
Too busy with family	24.1	10	30.9	9	38.2	4	48.7	3	54.7	2	50.6	2
Overcrowded facilities	42.9	6	42.9	3	37.5	5	44.8	5	37.0	4	42.4	3
Poorly maintained facilities	44.8	5	36.9	6	23.0	8	30.0	6	28.3	6	29.8	5
No opportunity near home	37.9	7	39.8	4	29.5	6	29.7	7	26.9	7	23.1	7
Don't know where to go	48.3	4	32.1	8	26.6	7	20.5	8	17.1	9	17.2	8
Cost of transportation	24.1	11	39.3	5	20.0	9	19.8	9	15.8	10	6.6	12
Facility not physically convenient to use	31.0	8	18.4	11	16.8	10	11.9	10	19.6	8	14.8	9
Lack of physical abilities	27.6	9	17.8	12	11.3	11	10.4	11	7.5	11	12.7	10
Lack of transportation	24.1	12	23.0	10	9.8	12	9.1	12	5.5	12	3.9	14
Physically unable to participate	24.1	13	11.3	13	9.1	13	6.3	14	4.1	13	7.2	11
Not at ease in social situations	13.8	14	9.5	14	6.8	14	8.2	13	2.1	14	6.1	13

² households with under \$30,000 may include students and seniors

Barriers By Household Composition, 2000

Table 6 shows that households consisting of a couple without children place less importance on “too busy with family” while giving greater emphasis to the “cost of equipment/supplies”, “admission fees/charges”, “too busy with work” and “overcrowded facilities”. For couples with children at home, “too busy with work” ranks second followed by the “cost of equipment/supplies” and “admission fees/charges”. By contrast, single parents are most challenged by “too busy with work”, with economic considerations also ahead of “too busy with family”. This may be a reflection of the pressures this group is under to meet their economic needs before including recreation in their lifestyle.

Other differences of note include the higher ranking of facility over-crowding by single adults and people living in multiple adult households, with “too busy with family” less of a constraint.

**Table 6
Barriers by Household Composition**

	Couple, no kids		Couple with kids		Single adult		Single parent		2+ unrelated		2+ related	
	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank	%	rank
Cost of equipment/supplies	45.1	1	52.7	3	51.2	1	51.6	3	73.0	1	50.0	1
Admission fees/charges	43.7	2	44.6	4	41.6	3	53.2	2	56.8	2	43.6	3
Too busy with work	42.4	3	56.4	2	41.5	4	57.4	1	44.7	4	37.7	4
Too busy with family	31.5	5	63.7	1	12.4	13	48.4	4	16.2	10	30.2	6
Overcrowded facilities	37.4	4	41.0	5	50.0	2	41.0	5	54.1	3	45.3	2
Poorly maintained facilities	23.8	7	31.8	6	36.9	5	30.0	7	40.5	5	28.8	7
No opportunity near home	28.5	6	29.9	7	29.6	7	38.7	6	40.5	5	27.8	8
Don't know where to go	23.2	8	18.9	9	30.1	6	29.0	9	38.9	7	32.7	5
Cost of transportation	20.0	9	19.6	8	16.4	10	29.5	8	27.0	8	19.2	9
Facility not physically convenient to use	17.6	10	15.7	10	21.1	8	18.3	11	13.5	11	17.0	10
Lack of physical abilities	13.7	11	10.2	11	20.8	9	11.3	13	5.6	12	13.2	12
Lack of transportation	10.9	12	9.7	12	9.8	14	23.0	10	21.6	9	13.5	11
Physically unable to participate	8.5	13	6.4	13	13.9	11	12.7	12	2.7	14	9.4	14
Not at ease in social situations	6.0	14	5.7	14	13.9	12	8.3	14	5.4	13	11.3	13

Barriers By Location, 2000

Some variations in how different barriers to participation are perceived in communities of different sizes are evident from Table 7. The “cost of equipment/supplies” ranks first in communities above 6,000 but is second in smaller communities where “too busy with work” ranks first. While respondents from smaller communities also place less emphasis on the cost of admission fees, it is unclear from the Alberta Recreation Survey whether this reflects lower fees at facilities in smaller communities, or other reasons. Overcrowded facilities and a lack of opportunities close to home are rated more important in communities with populations of less than 6,000.

**Table 7
Barriers by Location**

	Community Population					
	500,000 and over		6,000 to 65,000		Under 6,000	
	%	<i>rank</i>	%	<i>rank</i>	%	<i>rank</i>
Cost of equipment/supplies	51	<i>1</i>	51	<i>1</i>	49	<i>2</i>
Admission fees/charges	45	<i>4</i>	45	<i>3</i>	34	<i>6</i>
Too busy with work	51	<i>1</i>	48	<i>2</i>	52	<i>1</i>
Too busy with family	46	<i>3</i>	45	<i>3</i>	44	<i>4</i>
Overcrowded facilities	42	<i>5</i>	39	<i>5</i>	48	<i>3</i>
Poorly maintained facilities	29	<i>7</i>	31	<i>6</i>	32	<i>7</i>
No opportunity near home	30	<i>6</i>	28	<i>7</i>	37	<i>5</i>
Don't know where to go	23	<i>8</i>	25	<i>8</i>	30	<i>9</i>
Cost of transportation	18	<i>9</i>	23	<i>9</i>	31	<i>8</i>
Facility not physically convenient to use	17	<i>10</i>	14	<i>10</i>	20	<i>10</i>
Lack of physical abilities	13	<i>11</i>	10	<i>11</i>	12	<i>12</i>
Lack of transportation	11	<i>12</i>	8	<i>12</i>	20	<i>10</i>
Physically unable to participate	9	<i>13</i>	7	<i>13</i>	5	<i>13</i>
Not at ease in social situations	7	<i>14</i>	7	<i>13</i>	5	<i>13</i>

Historic Demographic Relationships to Barriers to Participation

Analysis of the previous Alberta Recreation Surveys has found that some barriers are associated with specific demographic characteristics. In 1981 significant differences in the perceptions of barriers were found in the analysis using age, education, income, and the type of household. It was also found that those Albertans facing economic difficulties had stronger perceptions of barriers.

Other common links include:

- cost and time factors are always among the five highest ranked constraints;
- family and work commitments increase in importance among the 25 to 44 year cohort;
- single parents are more affected by barriers;
- couples with no children appear to be less affected;
- age and income are most likely to account for differences in perceptions of barriers;
- the importance of physical barriers increases with age;
- cost factors decrease in importance with age;
- not knowing where to take part mostly affects the under-25 years and over-65 years age cohorts;
- time as a barrier, whether due to work or family commitments increases as income increases.

Research into the constraints or barriers to participation in recreation and leisure activities grew quite rapidly during the 1980s and early 1990s but has been less prevalent in recent years (Jackson and Burton, 1999). Analysis conducted as part of previous research has highlighted some specific trends that can be compared to the findings from analysis of the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey.

Findings from some research have revealed that non-participants tend to be less interested in taking part and consequently more likely to perceive themselves to be constrained (Petrick et al, p.58, 2001, and Carroll and Alexandris, p.294, 1997). However, Carroll and Alexandris (1997) have put forward another aspect, stating that even participants who take part in recreation on a regular and frequent basis can also exhibit high levels of constraint. However, their commitment to continuing to take part prevents them from ending their participation.

While lack of interest and lack of knowledge have been shown to contribute to non-participation (Carroll and Alexandris, p.281; 1997), Havitz and Dimanche, (p.142, 1999) have noted the link between the pleasure derived from participation and the level of importance of constraints. The extent to which individuals enjoy their activities helps to encourage continued involvement. Enjoyment may be defined in many ways but might include a desire to set and achieve personal goals, wanting to improve performance, wanting to emulate the achievement of others (e.g. peers or professionals), or simply wanting to spend time in a different environment from work or home.

Skill level, feelings about an activity, and other decision-making factors are often more influential than demographic characteristics (Petrick et al, p.59; 2001; Havitz and Dimanche, pp.124-125, 1999). One can consider the self-expression and self-confidence found among young males playing tennis who drive themselves to play well, be competitive and achieve personal recognition or status (Havitz and Dimanche, p.142, 1999).

Overcoming barriers to participation often requires some form or degree of change in the behaviour patterns of individuals. This is most commonly associated with the trade-offs people

are willing to make to accommodate recreational activities among the many other commitments they have. This negotiated approach and the actions resulting from it, can include a modification of time, acquisition of skills, change of interpersonal relations and change in leisure aspirations (Carroll and Alexandris, p.281; 1997). In a negotiated process, decision-making factors and trade-offs can overcome barriers (Alexandris and Carroll, p.118; 1997). Effectively, this requires some degree of encouragement, incentive or expression of benefits, to begin participation.

The motivation to participate decreases as age increases (Carroll and Alexandris, p.290; 1997) and perceptions of constraints decrease as education level increases. However, the true relationship between perceptions of constraints and participation in recreation is both complex and unclear (Carroll and Alexandris, p.279; 1997). Inconsistencies exist for reasons linking lack of participation with socio-demographic variables (Havitz and Dimanche, p.143, 1999).

Some distinctions have been found for students and women. Research has found that students are somewhat less constrained and more interested (Alexandris and Carroll, p.119; 1997). Women have been found to be more likely to be constrained by inter-personal factors such as shyness, lack of skills, lack of knowledge as well as financial factors (Alexandris and Carroll, p.120; 1997; Tsai and Coleman, p.258, 1999), although the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey results do not support this trend.

Stage of the life cycle is also influential. Personal constraints increase with age and being married with a family means higher time and family constraints (Alexandris and Carroll, p.121; 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, p.120; 1997).

Some researchers have hypothesized that barriers to participation vary among different cultural groups. However, Tsai and Coleman (p.254, 1999) found few strong relationships. They found that education levels were more of a factor for those who were starting activities and for those who had recently reduced their levels of participation. Time and cost factors remained important while social-cultural factors such as language were less important to preventing participation (Tsai and Coleman, p.255, 1999). The most significant factor in Tsai and Coleman's study was the lack of companions among a cultural community with whom to take part.

Limitations in Our Barriers Research

To fully understand the implications of the research and analysis of barriers that restrict Albertans' participation in recreation, it is important to consider several limitations. For the Alberta Recreation Survey, a key consideration is the relative position of the barriers question on the questionnaire. It is asked in the context of the desire to start a new activity and the expectations that something might prevent or restrict participation. This question is asked only of those who wish to start a new activity and, as a result, is not answered by all respondents, and this tends to result in a significant percentage of the sample not being eligible to provide their input. It would be helpful to find out from all Albertans, rather than a sub-sample, about the factors that they find to be limitations to their participation.

For comparisons between barriers across surveys since 1981, the main challenge lies in the types of rating scales that have been used. In 1981, a 3-point scale was used and then a 5-point scale in 1984. The use of a 4-point scale since 1988 has helped to make comparisons easier, and consistency of this type is required for future surveys to facilitate comparative analysis.

Some terminology is also unclear. For example, the item 'facilities are not physically convenient to use' suggests an access barrier but there is no specific meaning attached to this item leaving respondents to place their own interpretation on it. Consequently, the survey may not be getting at the full impact of this type of barrier. Similarly, the item 'cost of transportation' assumes respondents will group all such costs, be it bus fares, the cost of operation, or even airfares for the more exotic activities.

Lastly, since the barriers question is asked in relation to activities respondents might like to start, some analysis relating these specific activities to the relative importance of the various constraints would be insightful. Barriers are specific to the desired activity (e.g. downhill skiing) which may raise issues of cost, location and transportation, and may not indicate barriers in general. Further to this is the value of asking about activities that have ceased (as was asked in the 1984 survey) and the relative importance of constraints in the decision to end the activities reported.

What Can Practitioners Do?

With Albertans showing most concern with economic barriers, the challenge for practitioners is to demonstrate the true benefits of participation. In this regard, we must remember that our own commitment to recreation and our own understanding of its benefits is in all likelihood at a higher level than among the majority of Albertans. They may not always see that the benefits to personal health and wellness are life-long and can positively contribute to quality of life, rather than being something that is discretionary and that can be done to fill any spare time. Whether walking, gardening, mountain biking or taking part in a team sport, various forms of recreation are available to keep us physically and mentally fit, and we don't all need to spend large amounts of money to access these benefits. Keeping the average Albertan informed on simple and low-cost ways to keep active is fundamental to the role of the practitioner in the 21st Century.

Part of achieving successful communication of the benefits of recreation involves providing Albertans with clear definitions of what those benefits are. Once this is done, clear statements can be made to support why we should be active in ways that suit our individual needs. While building these benefits statements into public communications programs can be done in ways that target the general population, there is also evidence to indicate that specific messages need to reach specific segments of the population. In this way, potential participants can learn about where to go and what to do to enjoy low cost but high value recreational opportunities.

Practitioners must also recognize that as Albertans reach different stages of the life cycle - from early adulthood, to family orientation, to older adulthood - needs change and so do the constraints to participation. As younger adults, we need to overcome cost and access issues before we become challenged by time and work commitments in our mid-adult years. Then as

we get older, we need to find opportunities that are not too physically taxing and we need to know where these can be found. Designing recreation programs that are targeted to a specific age group may not be enough when specific constraints exist to prevent participation; knowing what the constraints are within an age group and knowing how to overcome them is critical to supporting participation.

Recognition of the growing importance of perceptions of the declining condition of our recreation facilities will reflect how we deal with facility development and programming. Much of the recreation infrastructure in Alberta is passing its threshold age of 20 years and is due for replacement. Swimming pools with peeling tiles, arenas with an old ice plant, basketball courts with ripped or no nets are just some examples of lower standards than are expected. These things are being noticed and are now becoming a hindrance for a population that likes to spend its leisure time in modern facilities that incorporate contemporary features.

While the desire for the replacement and refurbishment of our facilities is one thing, the cost factor is another. User fees do not cover the full capital cost and are appearing to have a greater impact in limiting participation. In turn, this points to a need for low-cost opportunities to be made available. But it is not just the cost for new or renovated facilities that creates challenges - increasing cost of operations, especially utility charges, is placing further financial pressures on facility providers. Alternative funding is required to off-set the cost to providers and to reduce the influence of economic constraints on users, if participation is to be encouraged and supported.

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