

Abstract

Recreation and leisure programs play a vital role in the lives of older adults (55+). Research indicates that more active types of activity, in particular, are positively associated with higher health-related quality of life (Jenkins, Pienta, & Horgas, 2002). The purpose of this project was to examine the effects of recreation and leisure participation on older adults' (55+) quality of life. Four out of the five participants were female, and one of the participants was male. The participants ranged in age from 61-79, the mean age was 65. Participants were recruited from local Community Centres in Vancouver and Coquitlam and were enrolled (or had previously been enrolled) in community recreation and leisure programs. Semi-structured, one-to-one, 30 minute interviews were conducted. Participants were asked a number of questions about participating in these programs, the effects they have experienced through participating, and their quality of life. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim, analyzed, and descriptively coded to organize data into categories based on my research question. Findings revealed that research participants' experienced positive effects from participating in recreation and leisure programs, especially noticing increased positive emotions, social well-being, physical health, and psychological well-being, which contributed to an increase in participants' quality of life.

Key words: Community recreation, leisure, older adults, quality of life.

Literature Review

- "Prior research indicates that involvement in activity is an important correlate of healthy aging among community-dwelling elders." (Jenkins et al., 2002)
- "Opportunities for social interaction provided by physical activity is an important motivation and benefit associated with physical activity." (Finch, 1997)
- "Growing evidence supports the antidepressant effect of exercise and its role in improving emotional, cognitive, social and perceived physical function of older adults, and alleviating physical symptoms." (Taylor, Cable, Faulkner, Hillsdon, Narici & Van Der Bij, 2004)
- "Physical activity levels correlated significantly with overall quality of life and the physical health domain." (Koltyn, 2001)



Research Methods

- Participants were recruited from local Community Centres in Vancouver and Coquitlam
- Four participants were female, one participant was male
- All participants were over 55 years of age, they ranged in age from 61-79; the mean age was 65
- All participants were enrolled (or had previously been enrolled) in community recreation and leisure programs
- Semi-structured, one-to-one, 30 minute interviews were conducted
- Raw data consisted of participant face sheets and interview transcripts (verbatim)
- The interview transcripts were analyzed and descriptively coded to organize data into categories based on my research question
- 14 codes were identified, a codebook was then developed
- Themes were created that reflect common feelings and experiences among participants
- Trustworthiness strategies used: triangulation, reflexivity, audit trail, and peer debriefing
- Ethical considerations: consent forms, transcripts of the interviews were stripped of identifying information, pseudonyms were used



Findings

Theme #1: Increased Positive Emotions

- Feelings of happiness
- A sense of accomplishment

"Especially in this age group, I think everybody is just happy to be able to still be doing something. It's a social gathering and it's fun and people are happy to be there, so it's always a positive experience!" (Tracy, research participant)

Theme #2: Increased Social Well-Being

- A sense of community, belonging, and inclusion
- Being motivated by others
- Having fun with others
- Increased friendships and camaraderie

"The social aspect of it, and feeling a part of the community, a part of the pickle ball group, a part of the golf group, a part of the curling team, feeling connected is, I think, particularly important in the 55+ population." (Deborah, research participant)

Theme #3: Increased Physical Health & Psychological Well-Being

"Well, I feel like it gives people a real sense of well-being. I think it's very healthy for people, physically and mentally, it makes people feel good." (Deborah, research participant)



Discussion

- All participants discussed that they experienced increased positive emotions, social well-being, physical health, and psychological well-being participating in recreation and leisure programs
- "Growing evidence supports the antidepressant effect of exercise and its role in improving emotional, cognitive, social and perceived physical function of older adults." (Taylor et al., 2004)

Conclusion

Findings revealed that research participants' experienced positive effects from participating in recreation and leisure programs, especially noticing increased positive emotions, social well-being, physical health, and psychological well-being, which contributed to an increase in participants' quality of life.

Recommendations

- A larger sample size, more male research participants
- Increase knowledge and resources within the community regarding recreation and leisure programs for older adults (55+)
- Provide educational opportunities for older adults (55+) in the community to learn more about recreation and leisure programs and their possible effects

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