

Examining the relationship between the perceived benefit and life engagement of individuals participating in sportive recreational activities

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the perceived benefits and life engagement of individuals who participate in sportive recreational activities. The sample group consisted of 415 individuals who were actively participating in sportive recreational activities in recreational parks and areas. A personal information form, Leisure benefit scale, and life engagement test were used as data collection tools. The data were analyzed using the SPSS software. One-Way ANOVA, t-test, and Pearson Correlation test were used in the data analysis. The results of the study revealed that the life engagement levels of individuals who participated in sportive recreational activities on a weekly basis at a high rate were significantly higher than those who participated in sportive recreational activities on a weekly basis at a low rate. In terms of recreational benefit, it was observed that higher social and psychological benefits were obtained between those participating in sportive recreational activities for 1-5 years. Furthermore, there was a moderate positive correlation between recreational benefit and life engagement. Consequently, continuous participation in sportive recreational activities increased recreational benefit and life engagement. In addition, life engagement increased with the increase in recreational benefit obtained from sportive recreational activities. It is suggested to increase the physical facilities and capacities of recreation parks and areas in order to facilitate access and participation in sportive recreational activities. It is also recommended to organize programs and activities that encourage the community to regularly participate in sportive recreational activities by directing individuals who have participated in recreational activities for many years to sportive recreational activities where they can gain new experiences.

Key Words: Leisure, Outdoor and Indoor Recreation, Recreational Benefit, Reasons for sustaining life

Introduction

Nowadays, people are developing various strategies to suppress stressors at their work and personal lives, so that they can refresh and recharge themselves and become holistically stronger (Hacker & Doolen, 2003; Chun et al., 2012). People can consider leisure activities, events or recreational organizations as good alternatives to escape from the negativity of life (Lee et al., 2023; Koç & Pekel, 2023). Leisure activities have become indispensable due to the fact that many people lead intense work-lives and endure tremendous stress (Eskiler et al., 2019; Veal, 2023). Leisure activities encompass what people do in their free time after work and other obligatory tasks (Bayram, 2022) and can prevent them from suffering from potential psychological and physical risk factors (Wang et al., 2012; Tütüncü, 2012). Individuals engage in them out of their own free will. They entertain and gratify them, and trigger happiness – even if they lack symbolic gain (Bayram, 2017). Leisure activities have dynamics that play an intermediary role for real life experiences that help people develop a sense of self and personal satisfaction and existentially find the meaning and purpose in life (Creighton-Smith et al., 2017; Heintzman, 2009). They can relieve boredom and break the monotony by regulating existential emptiness (Keskin, 2019) – thus, positively impacting one's life in various ways. They allow people to interact with each other and to reflect their relationships with a high perception of power and existence. Leisure activities offer people many physical, social and psychological benefits, as they are a voluntary socialization tool that comes with immense freedom (Bayram, 2022). Any non-compulsory activity is recreational (Morse, 2020; Brymer et al., 2021).

Recreational and leisure activities have an intense relationship with one another. Recreational activities can include any range of physical, cultural, social, and even educational activities that motivate people (Lackey et al., 2021; Uslu & Gorucu, 2024). People prefer to engage in them for physical and psychological relaxation, rest and refreshment to get rid of stress and similar negative emotions arising from their intense and monotonous lives (Alanoğlu et al., 2020). They enjoy psychological benefits, get rid of the pressure of life off their backs and achieve emotional freedom, not to mention flex their creativity and enjoy more life (Yalçınkaya et al., 2022). Recreational activities can have a positive impact on psychological health of people and help them better cope with the stressors (Takeda et al., 2015). Such activities also encourage healthy social interaction, and allow one

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to meet new friends, bond (build trust), and even acquire a sense of prestige (Sirgy et al., 2017). They offer social mobility, which is a strong indicator for the quality of life of the city dwellers (Lee et al., 2014). Likewise, nature-based recreational activities (i.e. parks) improve people's overall quality of life as well. Parks make cities more livable and healthier (Li, 2020) and attract intense interest from all walks of society. Structurally, parks encourage to engage in physical and sport-based recreational activities (Joseph & Maddock, 2016). Especially with the development of body awareness with participation in recreational activities where physical ones are dominant; physical benefits such as having a healthier body, learning or improving skills, and ensuring sleep patterns are obtained (Li et al., 2021; Öztürk, 2022; Terrazzo-Luna et al., 2024). Sportive recreational activities play an intermediary role in the sustainability of a healthy and peaceful society. In addition to their physical forms, they can include yoga, pilates, zumba and so on (Taşkıran & Kaya, 2015).

People can engage in sportive recreational activities in order to have fun, keep healthy, feel good and get satisfied with life instead of focusing on the competitive nature of sports (Keskin & Bayram, 2018). People can engage in these activities in nature or in recreational parks, areas and facilities (Gümüş & Özgül, 2017). Furthermore, they can participate in sportive recreational activities within the scope of various organisations or based on their own schedule. It is required for people to participate in activities for achieving psychological well-being, providing social interaction as a means of socialization, and gaining healthier lifestyle habits (Yalçın & Ayhan, 2020)- only if they participate in them and have enough time to spend with activities (Akyıldız, 2013). Moreover, they can add meaning to their life in this process (Bağcı et al., 2019), connect them to life and make them more productive (Koç et al., 2022). Various factors such as stress, depression, and struggling to finding meaning in life brought about by urban life may negatively affect the life commitment of the society. Since sportive recreational activities have features that trigger positive emotions, they may be effective in solving this problem. However, more research is needed that focuses on what causes these problems in the first place. Hence, this study aims to investigate and explain the relationship between the perceived benefit and life engagement of individuals participating in sportive recreational activities. Since there is a limited number of studies on the variables of recreational benefit and life engagement, this study would make contributions to these studies in this field.

Material & methods

This study was designed as a correlational survey model based on quantitative methods that keep the information independent of the researcher (Yıldırım, 1999). The correlational survey model is a research method used to reveal the value and degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2018). The study was planned to reveal the relationship between the perceived recreational benefit and life engagement of individuals who participated in sportive recreational activities in a large sample group.

Sample group The population of this study consisted of individuals participating in sportive recreational activities in Elazığ/Türkiye. The sample group of the study consisted of 415 individuals who engaged in any sportive recreational activity in recreational parks and areas. Since the sample of 384 people can be considered to represent the population (Ural & Kılıç, 2006), it can be asserted that 415 sportive recreational activity participants included in the study was a sufficient number. Sample selection was conducted according to simple random sampling method, in which the selection of the participants depends entirely on chance or probability (Özdamar, 2001).

Data collection tools A personal information form, the 'Leisure benefit Scale', and the 'Life Engagement Test' were used as data collection tools in the study.

Leisure benefit scale The Leisure benefit scale, which was developed by Ho (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Uğur & Akin (2018), was used to determine the recreational benefit levels of recreational activity participants. The scale consists of 24 items and 3 subscales (psychological benefit, physical benefit, social benefit). Its items are rated using a 5-point Likert type scale [(1) Strongly disagree, ..., (5) Strongly agree]. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used for the construct validity of the scale. The confirmatory factor analysis of the scale showed that the scale supported a 3-factor structure and was compatible with its original version (GFI=.96, NFI=.94, CFI=.95, IFI=.95, SRMR=.05). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be $\alpha=.83$ and $\alpha=.81$ for the physical subscale, $\alpha=.80$ for the psychological subscale and $\alpha=.86$ for the social subscale. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be $\alpha=.96$ in overall scale, and $\alpha=.92$ for the physical subscale, $\alpha=.90$ for the psychological subscale and $\alpha=.91$ for the social subscale.

Life engagement test The life engagement test was developed by Scheier et al., (2006) and adapted into Turkish by Uğur & Akin (2015). The scale has 6 items and a single dimension in the form of 5-point Likert [(1) Strongly disagree, ..., (5) Strongly agree]. The items 1, 3 and 5 of the scale are reverse coded. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used for the construct validity of the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the model gave a good fit ($\chi^2= 11.50$, $sd= 8$, $RMSEA= .039$, $GFI= .99$, $AGFI= .97$, $IFI= .99$, $NFI= .97$, $NNFI= .98$, $CFI= .99$, $RFI= .94$, and $SRMR= .032$). The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as $\alpha= .74$. In this study, the internal consistency of the scale was determined as $\alpha= .82$.

Data collection method The data were collected from individuals who stated that they were actively participating in sportive activities for recreational purposes in recreational parks and areas before the activities

by holding face-to-face interviews with them. The participants were informed about the study and granted their consent to participate voluntarily in the study.

Ethical considerations For this study, ethical approval was obtained from Bingöl University, Health Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (dated 18/10/2022, numbered 22/18, Decision: 6).

Data analysis The data were analyzed by using SPSS 24 software. Descriptive analyses were run to show the demographic characteristics of the participants. Skewness and kurtosis values were checked to determine whether or not the data were normally distributed. It was determined that there were no abnormal and extreme values in the data and the data showed normal distribution (Table 1); therefore, parametric tests were applied. In order to determine the differences between the variables, independent samples t-test for paired groups and One-Way ANOVA analyses for more than two groups were run. Post-Hoc Tukey test was used to determine the source of the difference in ANOVA analysis. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between variables. In the statistical analyses, the significance level was accepted as $p < .05$.

Results

This section presents the findings and interpretations of the statistical analyses conducted in the present study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants' scores on the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Life Engagement	415	25.68	13.00	30.00	-.902	.020
Physical Benefit	415	30.43	13.00	35.00	-1.175	1.380
Psychological Benefit	415	34.64	16.00	40.00	-.903	.973
Social Benefit	415	38.60	18.00	45.00	-.799	.538

When examining the results of the normality tests of the life engagement test and leisure benefit scale, it was found that the Skewness and Kurtosis values ranged between -1.5 and +1.5 points in all subscales and total score of the scales. Tabachnick et al., (2007), stated that if the Skewness and Kurtosis values are between -1.5 and +1.5 points, this means that the data are normally distributed and parametric tests should be used.

Table 2. T-test results of the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale according to gender variable

Scales	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	t	p
Life Engagement	Female	140	26.08	3.99	1.352	.177
	Male	275	25.48	4.43		
Physical Benefit	Female	140	30.49	4.52	.185	.854
	Male	275	30.40	4.73		
Psychological Benefit	Female	140	34.96	4.52	.991	.322
	Male	275	34.48	4.69		
Social Benefit	Female	140	39.10	5.42	.1270	.205
	Male	275	38.35	5.79		

There was no statistically significant difference between the gender of the participants and the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale (physical benefit, psychological benefit, social benefit) ($p > .05$).

Table 3. ANOVA results of the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale according to the variable of attendance experience in sportive recreational activities

Scales	Attendance Experience in Sportive Recreational Activities (Year)	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p	Post Hoc
Life Engagement	0-5 ^A	212	25.49	4.31	.597	.551	-
	6-10 ^B	133	26.01	4.28			
	11 and above ^C	70	25.63	4.32			
Physical Benefit	0-5 ^A	212	30.75	4.23	1.449	.236	-
	6-10 ^B	133	30.30	4.96			
	11 and above ^C	70	29.69	5.23			
Psychological Benefit	0-5 ^A	212	35.06	4.07	5.476	.004*	A-C B-C
	6-10 ^B	133	34.84	4.77			
	11 and above ^C	70	33.00	5.62			
Social Benefit	0-5 ^A	212	39.02	5.15	4.913	.008*	A-C B-C
	6-10 ^B	133	38.95	5.63			
	11 and above ^C	70	36.69	6.86			

* $p < .05$

A significant difference was found between the variable of the attendance experience in sportive recreational activities and the psychological benefit and social benefit subscales of the leisure benefit scale ($p<.05$). This difference was found between participants participating in activities for 0-5 years and those participating in activities for 11 years and above and between those participating in activities for 6-10 years and those participating in activities for 11 years and above in the psychological benefit and social benefit subscales. Moreover, no statistically significant difference was observed between the life engagement test and physical benefit subscale and the attendance experience in sportive recreational activities ($p>.05$).

Table 4. ANOVA results of the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale according to the variable of weekly participation in sportive recreational activities

Scales	Weekly Participation in Sportive Recreational Activities (Hour)	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	F	p	Post Hoc
Life Engagement	7 or below ^A	127	24.80	4.45	3.840	.022*	A-C
	8-14 ^B	160	25.79	4.46			
	15 or above ^C	128	26.25	3.82			
Physical Benefit	7 or below ^A	127	30.28	4.95	.513	.599	-
	8-14 ^B	160	30.26	4.69			
	15 or above ^C	128	30.77	4.33			
Psychological Benefit	7 or below ^A	127	34.43	4.90	.367	.693	-
	8-14 ^B	160	34.59	4.69			
	15 or above ^C	128	34.91	4.32			
Social Benefit	7 or below ^A	127	38.09	5.86	.772	.463	-
	8-14 ^B	160	38.88	5.78			
	15 or above ^C	128	38.78	5.36			

* $p<.05$

A significant difference was found between the weekly participation hours of the participants in sportive recreational activities and the life engagement test ($p<.05$). This difference was found between the participants who participated in activities for 7 hours or below per week and those who participated for 15 hours or above per week in the dimension of life engagement. Furthermore, no statistically significant difference was observed between the subscales of the leisure benefit scale and the variable of weekly participation hours in sportive recreational activities ($p>.05$).

Table 5. Results of pearson correlation analysis related to the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale

Variables	1	2	3	4
Life Engagement (1)	r	1		
	p			
Physical Benefit (2)	r	.414**	1	
	p	.000		
Psychological Benefit (3)	r	.387**	.801**	1
	p	.000	.000	
Social Benefit (4)	r	.345**	.654**	.738**
	p	.000	.000	.000

N:415; ** $p<.01$

When the correlation analysis between the variables was analyzed, it was determined that there was a positive and moderately significant correlation between the participants' scores on the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale (physical benefit, psychological benefit, and social benefit) ($p<.05$).

Discussion

In this study, conducted to investigate the relationship between recreational benefit levels and life engagement of sportive recreational activity participants and determine whether there were differences between the variables, the related results were interpreted. In this sense, it was examined whether or not there were differences in the variables of gender, duration of participation in sportive recreational activities, and weekly participation time in sportive recreational activities according to the recreational benefit subscale and life engagement of the participants and it was discussed what caused the differences.

It was observed that there was no significant difference between the gender variable and the life engagement test and subscales of the leisure benefit scale. When the literature was examined, the related studies revealed that there was no significant difference between the life engagement and the gender variable (Scheier et al., 2006; Koç et al., 2022; Koç et al., 2019). While there are studies supporting that there is no significant difference between recreational benefit and gender variable, Di Bona (2000) reported that there was a significant

difference between the gender variable and recreational benefit levels of leisure activity participants. The related studies found that the recreational benefit levels of male participants were higher compared to their female counterparts (Chao, 2013; Philipp, 1997). The reason for this difference was that male participants had more recreational benefit due to their higher physical strength in participating in leisure activities. The reason for the lack of a difference in the current study was associated with the fact that people with all kinds of characteristics can easily engage in sportive recreational activities regardless of gender.

While there was no significant difference between the duration of participation in sportive recreational activities and life engagement test, there was a statistically significant difference between the duration of participation in activities and the psychological benefit and social benefit subscales. The related studies indicated that individuals who were regularly participating in physical-based recreational activities had a high level of life satisfaction (Aydın, 2020), and their well-being was related to the duration of activity (Aral, 2020). Researchers have stated that positive relationships develop with long-term experience of physical-based recreational activities and thus life satisfaction may also increase. When the recreational benefit dimension was examined, it was seen that the scores of individuals who were participating in sportive recreational activities for up to 5 years were significantly higher in the psychological benefit and social benefit subscales. This was thought to be due to the fact that stress can decrease upon the disruption of the boring lifestyle and the increase in social contacts after the activities become a habit in the first years of participation. The related studies reported that the physical, social and psychological benefits of recreational activity participants were high when they participated in the activities regularly (Akgönül et al., 2023; Aydın, 2020).

While there was a significant difference between the variable of weekly participation duration of the sport recreational activity and their life engagement test, there was no significant difference between this variable and the subscales of the leisure benefit scale. The participants who were participating in activities for 15 hours or more have significantly higher scores on the life engagement test. This difference was due the fact that as the time allocated to sport recreational activities increased, participants can gain motivation to realize their goals, desires and purposes in life through these activities and that activities can be a reason for sustaining life. The studies have also showed that individuals who participate in recreational activities for longer periods have higher life satisfaction (Eravşar, 2013; Taş, 2023; Öztürk, 2022). In addition, there were studies supporting that there was no significant difference between the duration of participation in recreational activities and recreational benefit (Öztürk, 2022; Güldür & Yaşartürk, 2020).

When the correlation analysis as examined, it was determined that there was a positive significant correlation between the life engagement of the participants and their subscales of the leisure benefit scale. As can be seen from this result, it can be asserted that the variables of recreational benefit and life engagement support and feed one another. As the benefit obtained from participation in sport recreational activities increased, the level of life engagement also elevated. This is because sportive recreational activities contribute positively to life engagement by improving physical health, providing social interaction, relieving stress, anxiety, depression and negative moods, and providing a high level of well-being, thus resulting in happiness. Among the studies supporting this result, Koç et al., (2022) found that there was a positive correlation between the recreational awareness and life engagement levels of sportive recreation activity participants. In their study, Carmel et al., (2023) reported that life engagement increased with the increase in participation in recreational activities. Karademir (2022) found that happiness was positively correlated with recreational benefits with participation in recreational activities. In addition, there was a positive correlation between recreational benefits and quality of life and life satisfaction (Lee & Lin 2011; Park et al., 2021). Chen et al., (2013), in their study, found a significant positive correlation between recreation benefit and elevated level of happiness.

Conclusions

It was concluded that there was no significant difference between the recreational benefit and life engagement levels of the participants in terms of gender, but the life engagement and recreational benefit levels of female participants were higher. Those who were regularly participating in sportive recreational activities had higher life engagement and recreational benefit levels. The life engagement and recreational benefit levels of the participants were higher as more time was allocated to sportive recreational activities per week. Furthermore, more physical, social and psychological benefits would be obtained in the first years of participation. It was concluded that there was a moderate positive correlation between the recreational benefit obtained by sportive recreational activity participants and life engagement. As the recreational benefit obtained from sportive recreational activities increases, life engagement may increase.

The physical, social and psychological benefits obtained from sportive recreational activities can enhance people's quality of life and help to solve stress, social isolation, negative emotions and problems of not finding meaning in life. At this point, participation in sportive recreational activities in parks and recreational areas may have the potential to elevate the level of life engagement of societies. It is envisaged that if people participate in sportive recreational activities, they would hold on to the life and have a good mood. Considering these results, it is recommended to conduct studies that can reduce men's responsibilities in life and increase their leisure time in order to encourage their participation in recreational activities. Since the recreational benefits of those who were participating in sport recreational activities for long periods were low, it was

recommended for recreation experts to provide opportunities that can excite the participants and allow them to experience different forms of recreational activities. At this point, improving the capacities of recreational parks and areas in order to facilitate access to recreational activities in different recreational areas by constantly allocating more time to sportive recreational activities can contribute to society. In order to determine the recreational benefit and life engagement levels of individuals in increasing participation in sportive recreational activities, this study can be repeated with larger sample groups in different recreational areas and then regional and recreational area differences can be discussed and studies can be carried out to solve the problems.

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