

Investigation of University Students' Recreation Benefit Awareness and Participation in Recreational Activities

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between university students' recreation benefit awareness and their participation in recreational activities, and to identify differences based on gender and academic department (recreation-related vs. other departments). This study was conducted using the relational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. The sample of the study consists of 780 women and 733 men, totalling 1513 university students. The data were obtained through a questionnaire consisting of a personal information form, the Recreation Benefit Scale, and the Frequency of Leisure Participation Scale. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms, and participants completed it electronically. SPSS 22 statistical analysis program was used for the data obtained. In data analyses, descriptive statistics, independent samples T-test for categorical variables including two groups and Pearson correlation analysis were used to analyse the relationships between numerical variables. $p < 0.05$ significance level was selected. It was determined that there was a statistically significant difference in the participants' awareness of physical ($p < 0.05$) and psychological ($p < 0.01$) recreation benefits and the type and frequency of participation in recreational activities according to gender. In addition, a significant difference was found in participants' awareness of the benefits of recreation, as well as in the type and frequency of their participation in recreational activities, based on their department. There was a positive correlation between participants' awareness of recreation benefits and the type and frequency of participation in recreational activities. It was determined that as university students' mean scores for recreational benefit awareness increased their frequency of participation in recreational activities also increased.

Keywords: Leisure time, Recreation benefit, Recreational activity participation

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INTRODUCTION

Today, technological, economic, cultural, and social developments have given people more leisure time and greater opportunities to engage in recreational activities (Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022). Leisure time is the period of time outside of all obligations, duties and responsibilities for oneself and others (Huang et al., 2014; Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022). Recreational activities, which people engage in during their leisure time based on their interests and preferences, contribute to personal development, relaxation, entertainment, and renewal. Engaging in various physical, social, cultural, and artistic recreational activities during leisure time contributes to socialization, cultural and personal development, as well as physical, physiological, and mental well-being (Barnett, 2005; Chang et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2018; Ersöz et al., 2023).

When individuals' expectations are met through participation in recreational activities, they experience positive emotions and states. The positive emotions and states individuals experience as a result of the benefits gained from recreational activities are referred to as recreation benefit awareness. Recreation benefit awareness refers to the experiential perceptions formed based on the fulfilment of expectations, achievement of goals, and the benefits gained after participating in leisure activities (Ersöz et al., 2023; Kuo & Feng, 2013; Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022; Young & Yeon, 2021). Recreation awareness is the process of recognizing the advantages and benefits gained from recreational activities during leisure time, leading to the development of positive thoughts (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In the literature, the physiological, social, psychological, educational, aesthetic, and relaxation benefits of recreation have been emphasized (Akgül et al., 2018), and the benefits of recreation activities have generally been categorized into three main headings: physiological, psychological, and social benefits. It has been reported that participation in recreational activities plays a vital role in improving physical and psychological health, preventing diseases, and enhancing the quality of life (Caltabiano, 1995). Recreation benefits are explained as the subjective evaluation of the individual's demand for satisfaction after participation in various recreational activities to improve their physical and mental state and to meet their individual needs and demands (Chen, 2001; Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022; Young & Yeon, 2021).

Ajzen (1991) explained that, according to social psychology theory, participation in recreative activities can provide benefits to individuals, and participants' high level of evaluation of recreation benefits can positively affect recreational activity participation attitudes and behaviors. The benefits gained from participation in recreational activities will encourage continued engagement, as they fulfill individual expectations, contribute to leisure time satisfaction, and promote a positive state. However, it is stated that the benefits and gains obtained from recreational activities are relative, and there will be individual differences in benefits and gains as a result of subjective evaluation (Chen, 2001; Huang & Carleton, 2003; Losier et al., 1993; Vapur & Sevin, 2021; Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022). Individuals primarily gain physiological and psychological benefits when they participate in leisure activities alone, whereas when they join an organized group or community for these activities, they obtain greater physiological, psychological, and social benefits (Chang et al., 2018). It has also been observed that students who regularly participate in multiple activities experience even greater

benefits. It has been reported that participation in recreational activities varies according to demographic variables (Kılıç & Şener, 2013; Paksoy et al., 2016). Yıldırım and Akbaş (2022) stated that there is a difference in university students' participation in recreational activities and their levels of leisure time satisfaction. As participation in recreational activities increases, leisure time satisfaction also rises, and satisfaction varies according to the type of activity. Lu and Hu (2005) explained that participation in different recreational activities leads to variations in the levels of benefits and satisfaction among individuals.

Based on the studies, it is predicted that there will be differences in recreational activity participation preferences based on demographic variables. Additionally, the frequency and type of participation may influence recreation benefit awareness, and as awareness increases, participation in recreational activities will also rise, leading to greater continuity. However, it has been determined that there are limited studies supporting this prediction, and more comprehensive research is needed. Additionally, no studies have been found that examine university students' awareness of recreation benefits according to different types of recreational activities. It is thought that examining the recreation benefit awareness of university students with different cultural, social, economic, etc. characteristics and the frequency and preferences of recreational activity participation will be a reference for future studies and contribute to the literature. In this context, the aim of the study is to examine the relationship between university students' recreation benefit awareness and their participation in recreational activities, and to identify differences based on gender and academic department (recreation-related vs. other departments).

METHOD

Research Model

This study was conducted using the relational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods.

Population and Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 780 female (mean age: 21.81 ± 3.35) and 733 male (mean age: 23.32 ± 3.72) university students from various universities in Türkiye, totalling 1,513 participants. All participants were required to be university students aged 18 years or older. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method. Among them, 138 students were enrolled in recreation-related departments (e.g., sports sciences, tourism faculties), while 1,375 students were enrolled in other departments.

These other departments included the Faculties of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Architecture, Education, Medicine, Health Sciences, Fine Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Economics and Administrative Sciences. The study included only students enrolled in the Recreation Department of the Faculty of Sport Sciences; students from other sport-related departments (e.g., Physical Education Teaching, Coaching Education) were excluded. Additionally, associate degree and graduate students were not included in the study.

Data Collection Tools

In this study, the data were obtained online via “Google Forms” with a questionnaire form consisting of a personal information form and Recreation Benefit Awareness and Participation in Recreational Activities type scale. The personal information form included information on characteristics such as age, gender, university department.

Recreation Benefit Scale: The 'Recreation Benefit Scale,' developed by Ho (2008) and whose validity and reliability for the Turkish population was established by Akgül et al., (2018), was used in the study. It was a 5-point Likert-type “(1= Strongly Disagree, ..., 5= Strongly Agree)”. The scale consists of 24 items and 3 sub-dimensions: physical (1-7), psychological (8-15) and social benefits (16-24) sub-dimensions. The internal consistency test results of the recreation benefit scale were 0.87 for the Physical sub-dimension, 0.90 for the Psychological sub-dimension and 0.89 for the Social sub-dimension.

Frequency of Leisure Participation: The Frequency of Leisure Participation Scale, developed by Chun et al., (2012) based on Ragheb's (1980) study, was used in this research. In Turkey, this scale was employed by Çabuk (2019) in their study on the life satisfaction and health perceptions of elderly individuals. The six Likert scale activity categories were: (a) outdoor activities such as hiking, camping and/or biking; (b) physical activities such as exercise, sports and/or other physical activities; (c) hobbies and indoor activities such as painting, playing a musical instrument and/or reading; (d) cultural activities and entertainment such as watching TV, playing computer games, attending movies, concerts and/or visiting museums; (e) home-centered and social activities such as socializing with friends, eating out, traveling and/or family time; and (f) civic activities such as community service or volunteering at community organizations. It was evaluated with a 10-point rating method.

Ethics Approval

This research received ethical approval from the Mersin University Sports Sciences Ethics Committee (Date 01/04/2024, Number 015). The data were collected between April 5, 2024, and May 5, 2024.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analysed with SPSS package program. The normality of the data was assessed based on skewness and kurtosis values. In this study, the skewness and kurtosis values of the obtained data were found to fall within the range of -2 to +2. According to George and Mallery (2010), skewness and kurtosis values within this range are acceptable for assuming normality. Therefore, it was concluded that the data were normally distributed. The descriptive statistics of the data obtained from the study are presented as the mean and standard deviation for numerical variables. In the comparison of scores obtained from the scales according to demographic variables, an independent samples t-test was used for categorical variables involving two groups. In addition, the relationships between numerical variables were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. The significance level of $p < 0.05$ was selected.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Comparison of participants' participation in recreational activities and recreation benefit awareness by gender

	Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Recreation Benefit Awareness	Physical	Female	780	4.25	.53	2.01	.044*
		Male	733	4.19	.58		
	Psychological	Female	780	4.24	.56	2.90	.001**
		Male	733	4.15	.59		
	Social	Female	780	4.13	.56	1.07	.284
		Male	733	4.09	.60		
Types of Recreational Activity Participation	Outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, fishing	Female	780	4.93	2.65	-5.30	.001**
		Male	733	5.66	2.71		
	Physical activities including sports and types of exercise	Female	780	5.03	2.72	-11.20	.001**
		Male	733	6.55	2.56		
	Hobbies and indoor activities such as painting, reading, playing musical instruments	Female	780	6.16	2.63	2.26	.024*
		Male	733	5.85	2.62		
	Cultural and entertainment activities such as watching television, going to the movies, concerts, museum visits	Female	780	5.85	2.59	-2.53	.012*
		Male	733	6.18	2.58		
	Home-centered and social activities such as visiting friends, spending time with family, home visits	Female	780	6.73	2.57	-1.09	.276
		Male	733	6.87	2.45		
	Volunteering and social responsibility activities	Female	780	4.91	2.70	-5.13	.001**
		Male	733	5.62	2.71		

*p<0.05; ** p<0.01

The physical ($p<.05$) and psychological ($p<.01$) sub-dimensions of the participants' recreation benefit awareness show a statistically significant difference in favour of women according to gender. When the type of participation and preferences of the participants in recreational activities were examined, it was seen that there was a statistically significant ($p<.05$ and $p<.01$) difference according to gender in all activities except “home-centered and social activities such as visiting friends, spending time with family, home visits”. Accordingly, it was determined that the mean scores of women in “Hobbies such as painting, reading books, playing musical instruments and indoor activities” were higher than men while their scores in other activities were lower than male participants. In addition, it was determined that the highest score of recreational activity participation of female and male participants was “Home-centered and

social activities such as visiting friends, spending time with family, home visits” and the lowest score was “Volunteering and social responsibility activities” (Table 1).

Table 2. Comparison of participants' participation in recreational activities and recreation benefit awareness by departments

	Variables	Departments	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Recreation Benefit Awareness	1.Physical	Recreation	138	4.30	.577	1.92	.055
		Other	1375	4.21	.554		
	2.Psychological	Recreation	138	4.26	.584	1.61	.107
		Other	1375	4.18	.580		
	3.Social	Recreation	138	4.24	.549	2.75	.006*
		Other	1375	4.10	.586		
Types of Recreational Activity Participation	4.Outdoor Activities	Recreation	138	6.01	2.69	3.31	.001**
		Other	1375	5.21	2.69		
	5.Physical Activities	Recreation	138	7.49	2.31	7,88	.001**
		Other	1375	5.60	2.73		
	6.Hobbies and Indoor Activities	Recreation	138	5.92	2.53	-0,41	.677
		Other	1375	6.02	2.64		
	7.Cultural and Recreational Activities	Recreation	138	6.03	2.46	0.08	.930
		Other	1375	6.01	2.60		
	8.Home-centered and Social Activities	Recreation	138	7.01	2.41	1.05	.295
		Other	1375	6.78	2.52		
	9.Volunteering and social responsibility activities	Recreation	138	5.72	2.514	2.10	.036*
		Other	1375	5.21	2.747		

*Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. ** Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

The social sub-dimension of the participants' recreation benefit awareness shows a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) in favour of recreation department students according to the departments. It was observed that there were significant differences in the types of recreational activity participation according to the departments ($p < .01$), and that the recreation department students had higher scores in all activities except “Hobbies such as painting, reading books, playing musical instruments and indoor activities” than the students studying in other departments (Table 2).

Table 3. The Relationship between recreational activity participation types and recreation benefit awareness

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Outdoor activities	r	1							
2. Physical activities	r	.538**							
3. Hobbies and indoor activities	r	.397**	.370**						
4. Cultural and recreational activities	r	.355*	.360**	.394**					
5. Home-centered and social activities	r	.275**	.280**	.249**	.453**				
6. Volunteering and social responsibility activities	r	.398**	.426**	.374**	.425**	.382**			
7. Physical	r	.066*	.074**	.107**	.075**	.099**	.064*		
8. Psychological	r	.056*	.051*	.088**	.089**	.091**	.046	.770**	
9. Social	r	.074**	.068**	.059*	.099**	.113**	.116**	.699**	.766**

*Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. ** Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

It was determined that there was a statistically positive relationship ($p < .01$) between the sub-dimensions of recreation benefit awareness and participation in recreational activity types (Table 3).

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The interconnected nature of recreational benefit awareness, leisure time management, and participation in recreational activities constitutes a fundamental aspect of individuals' physical, psychological, and social well-being (Karademir, 2023). University students represent a particularly significant demographic for investigating these relationships, given their concurrent navigation of developmental, academic, and social transitions (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017). Contemporary research has increasingly examined how students' awareness of recreational benefits influences their participation behaviors and activity preferences (Ersöz et al., 2023). This investigation sought to explore the relationship between university students' recreational benefit awareness and their participation across various recreational activities, with particular attention to gender and academic department as mediating variables. The findings illuminate how demographic factors influence recreation-related perceptions and behaviors, underscoring the necessity for targeted recreational scheduling within higher education contexts (Ersöz et al., 2023; Karademir, 2023).

The existing literature often focuses on distinct but related areas of inquiry, including recreational benefit awareness (Ersöz et al., 2023; Ertüzün et al., 2020), leisure time management patterns (Acevedo & Stodolska, 2017; Dugan, 2011), and recreational activity participation behaviors (Kılıç & Şener, 2013; Paksoy et al., 2016; Yıldırım & Akbaş, 2022). The present study advances this body of knowledge by examining the relationship between university students' recreational benefit awareness and their participation in diverse recreational activities through the lens of gender and academic department variables.

The study findings revealed significant gender-based differences in the physical and psychological dimensions of recreational benefit awareness among university students, while no significant differences emerged in the social dimension. Female university students demonstrated significantly higher levels of both physical and psychological benefit awareness compared to their male counterparts (Table 1).

Previous work in the literature presents conflicting findings regarding gender differences in recreational benefit awareness. Several studies report no significant gender-based variations (Ertüzün et al., 2020; Karaküçük et al., 2019; Korkutata & Özavcı, 2021; Öztürk, 2022), while others demonstrate clear gender distinctions (Ayhan et al., 2022; Karademir, 2023; Philipp, 1997). Kurtipek et al. (2022) found that university students showed no gender differences in social and physical dimensions of recreational benefit awareness, yet women scored higher in the psychological benefit dimension. Conversely, Lee et al. (2016) reported no gender differences in psychological benefit awareness. Further contradicting these findings, Karademir (2023) found that men demonstrated higher recreational benefit scores as compared to women. In a cross-cultural study involving European, African, and American participants, Philipp (1997) discovered that European and American women derived greater physical and social benefits from recreational activities in comparison to men. These inconsistent findings likely stem from variations in participants' age, educational background, and cultural, social, and economic contexts (White et al., 2020).

Research conducted specifically with Turkish university students sharing relatively homogeneous demographic characteristics tends to support findings that favor women in recreational benefit awareness. Ayhan et al. (2022) found that women scored higher across social, psychological, and physical benefit dimensions. Similarly, Ersöz et al. (2023) reported higher physical and psychological benefit scores among women, though they found no difference in social benefits. This pattern may reflect underlying gender differences in recreational preferences.

Our study findings appear to substantiate such observations, revealing statistically significant gender differences ($p < .01$) in recreational activity participation and preferences across most categories, with the exception of “home-based and social activities such as visiting friends, spending time with family, and home visits.” Women demonstrated higher participation in “hobbies such as painting, reading books, playing musical instruments, and indoor activities,” while men showed greater engagement in other recreational pursuits (Table 1). Prior research indicates that women's overall participation in leisure activities tends to be lower than men's (Arat & Çalımlı, 2017), attributed partly to time constraints and financial limitations (Ayhan

et al., 2022; Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Jackson & Henderson, 1995). Gürsoy and Sevin, (2021) documented higher male participation in outdoor, sports, and social activities, while women preferred hobbies, outdoor entertainment, and cultural activities. Sarıbaş (2012) found that women attribute greater positive value to leisure activities than do men.

Gender is known to influence both recreational benefit awareness and activity preferences. Women appear to derive greater satisfaction from activities that correspond to their personal objectives and expectations, particularly hobbies and indoor recreational pursuits. This pattern underscores the necessity of incorporating gender-specific considerations into recreational programming and research initiatives (Kamau, 2022). Students enrolled in recreation programs exhibited higher participation scores across all activities except “hobbies such as painting, reading books, playing musical instruments, and indoor activities.” Recreation students also demonstrated elevated mean scores in the social dimension of recreational benefit awareness compared to their peers in other academic programs (Table 2). These results align with Ersöz et al. (2023), who reported that students in Sports Sciences Faculties displayed higher levels of physical activity participation and greater recreational benefit awareness relative to students in other faculties. Yıldırım and Akbaş, (2022) further emphasized that recreational activity participation patterns and leisure satisfaction varied significantly across faculties, with sports sciences students achieving higher averages in both domains. Bozdağ and Şahin, (2020) identified substantial differences in leisure participation by faculty affiliation and documented elevated participation scores among students enrolled in physical education and sports programs. On top of that, Zhou and Tsai, (2019) proposed that university students who engage in structured leisure planning develop more robust participation behaviours because perceived personal benefits offset the impact of leisure constraints. Building on this framework, we suggest that the specialized curriculum and educational approach in recreation programs could enhance students' engagement in recreational activities, thus increasing their awareness of recreational benefits.

We hypothesized that prior participation in recreational activities would be positively correlated with awareness of recreational benefits, and the findings of the study supported this hypothesis. A statistically significant positive relationship emerged between recreational benefit awareness subdimensions and participation across various recreational activities. Corroborating this, Adams et al. (2011) demonstrated that engagement in physical leisure activities positively influences benefit awareness. Ersöz et al. (2023) similarly identified a positive association between recreational benefit awareness and physical activity levels among university students. Kürkcü-Akgönül et al. (2023) also found that participation duration significantly influences recreational benefit levels, with individuals who have participated for four years or longer showing higher benefit awareness than those with shorter engagement periods. Özant et al. (2025) emphasized that participation enhances motivation and practice intensity through perceived benefits related to sports, recreation, and health.

Such findings collectively indicate a bidirectional positive relationship between recreational benefit awareness and activity participation. Individuals who recognize recreational benefits are more likely to choose activities that address their needs and engage in regular participation, while increased participation further enhances their benefit awareness.

In conclusion, female university students demonstrated higher physical and psychological recreational benefit awareness than did their male counterparts. Gender differences also emerged in recreational activity participation types and preferences. Recreation students achieved higher participation scores than students in other departments across most activities, with the exception of hobbies such as painting, reading, and musical instrument playing. Recreation students similarly scored higher on the social dimension of recreational benefit awareness. Increased recreational benefit awareness correlated positively with more frequent recreational activity participation among university students.

This descriptive investigation, although limited to university students, contributes to a deeper understanding of the positive relationship between participation in recreational activities and awareness of their benefits. These findings provide a foundation for future research by suggesting that experimental and longitudinal designs involving diverse sample groups with varying demographic characteristics and structured recreational interventions could significantly advance understanding in this field.

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