

Ecorecreation and Life Satisfaction: The Role of Social Services in the Social Integration of Hearing Impaired Athletes

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Abstract

Ecorecreative activities for disadvantaged groups not only improve the physical and mental health of individuals, but also contribute to broader societal issues such as social justice and environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is of great importance to support and disseminate such activities. Based on this view, the aim of the study is to examine the life satisfaction of disadvantaged individuals participating in eco-creative activities. The study group consisted of 87 participants (mean age= 22.6±2.63) who were selected by random sampling method and whose ages ranged between 19 and 36. In addition to the personal information form created by the researcher, "Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS)" developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Dağlı and Baysal was used for data collection. The hypotheses formed within the scope of the research were tested using t-test and ANOVA analysis methods for independent samples. As a result of the findings, the scores of the participants from the life satisfaction scale were evaluated according to their participation in eco-creative activities. It was found that individuals who participated in eco-creative activities had higher life satisfaction mean scores than those who did not participate ($p<0.05$). No statistical significance was found in the mean scores obtained from the life satisfaction scale according to the gender variable ($p>0.05$). On the other hand, it was determined that there was no statistical significance according to the mean scores obtained from the scale according to the emotional state of the participants' participation in eco-creative activities ($p>0.05$). In conclusion, eco-creative activities are an effective tool to increase life satisfaction of individuals in disadvantaged groups. These activities enable individuals to connect with nature, cope with stress and improve their overall quality of life.

Keywords: Eco-creative, Athlete, Hearing impaired and life satisfaction, Social work, Social worker

Introduction

Ecorecreation is a concept that places environmental awareness and sensitivity at the heart of leisure policy and aims to encourage individuals to constantly remind themselves of their environmental awareness during and after such activities and to promote it in everyday life. Showing sensitivity to environmental problems is a fundamental duty for humanity and an important responsibility that every individual should assume as part of their global citizenship. Eco-regeneration refers to the implementation of recreational activities and related policies in accordance with the principles of "environmental protection" and "sustainability" (Karaküçük & Akgül, 2016; Akgül et al., 2022). Various ecorecreation activities carried out in nature are also evaluated within this framework (Yaşar & Şenel, 2018). Ecorecreation activities are activities that promote physical, mental and social health by enabling people to be in contact with nature (Kaplan, 1995). Such activities are of great importance for hearing-impaired athletes to increase their life satisfaction and ensure their social integration. Participation in these activities can also be of great benefit to hearing-impaired athletes. How social work practices can be integrated into such activities to increase the life satisfaction of hearing-impaired athletes, promote their social participation and support their social integration is also an important research topic.

Ecorecreation activities include organized or unorganized recreational activities that are oriented towards nature and take place in open spaces inside or outside the city. These include various outdoor activities such as hiking, diving, scouting, mountaineering, rafting, caving, skiing, yoga, camping, caravanning, cycling, etc. (Rybka and Szpytma, 2012). Participation in such activities is an important experience for almost everyone, as contact with nature can contribute to a better understanding of life and greater life satisfaction. Especially for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, the positive effects of ecorecreation activities are quite obvious. These activities, which enable these groups to participate more effectively in social and economic life, can improve their quality of life.

Disadvantaged groups include individuals who face a range of challenges due to socioeconomic factors, disability status, race or ethnicity, geographic isolation, and other factors (Smith et al., 2021; Glazier et al., 2006; Michie et al., 2009; Borkhoff et al., 2010). When dealing specifically with athletes with disabilities, physical education and sporting activities play a major role in minimizing the disadvantage of these individuals in terms of physical, social, intellectual and psychomotor developmental characteristics compared to individuals with normal development, ensuring their social adjustment and reducing inequality of opportunity.

When we examine the understanding of the welfare state, we come across the understanding of "the state that is obliged to ensure genuine equality, i.e. social justice and equity, by protecting the socially disadvantaged from the powerful". For this reason, creating an environment suitable for ensuring social justice within the framework of the policy of protecting the weak from the strong in society is among the fundamental tasks of the welfare state (Pektaş, 2010; Yay, 2014, Yeşil et al., 2019). If we consider this framework, recreational activities are an important point to ensure that hearing-impaired athletes, who see themselves socially behind other individuals, can communicate by being more integrated into society. Especially since hearing-impaired athletes, who are also the subject of the study, have difficulty perceiving the sounds in the environment due to their hearing loss, it is believed that environments in which they are associated with nature may socialize these individuals more and be a means for them to achieve life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is a concept that was first introduced into the literature by Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin (1961) and is based on the evaluation of a person's past and present life. Life satisfaction is an idea that arises from the comparison between a person's current resources and their future expectations. In this context, the best measure of life satisfaction is the person themselves. Life satisfaction refers to an individual's satisfaction with their life in general and is closely related to psychological well-being (Diener, 1984). For deaf athletes, life satisfaction can decrease for reasons such as communication difficulties, social isolation and barriers in business (Barnett, 2002). This can have a negative impact on the social integration and general quality of life of hearing impaired athletes.

Ecorecreative activities improve an individual's physical health, reduce stress levels and increase psychological well-being through interaction with nature (Kaplan, 1995). For people with a hearing impairment, participation in such activities helps to develop social skills and strengthen social bonds (Kyle, 2009). Activities in nature help individuals to feel better about themselves and improve their social relationships (Smith, 2020). Social workers can develop various strategies to improve the quality of life of hearing impaired people. Among these strategies, planning eco-creative activities and encouraging participation in these activities occupies an important place (Kemp, 2001). Social workers can increase the social participation of hearing-impaired athletes by facilitating their access to these activities and designing programs that meet their needs. Social workers can contribute to the social inclusion of hearing-impaired athletes by encouraging and supporting their participation in these activities (Kemp, 2001). This article examines the impact of participation in ecorecreational activities on the life satisfaction of hearing-impaired athletes and the role of social work in this process.

Material and Method

Ethics committee permission: Before starting our study, ethics committee permission was obtained from Hitit University Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee with the number 2024-284 and application number 2024-0408.

Research Model

This study was conducted based on the relational survey model. The survey model is used to make a general assessment about the studied group by collecting data from a large population (Karasar 2016; Büyüköztürk et al., 2017).

Participants

The population of the study consists of hearing-impaired athletes with audiological measurements of 40–90 decibels (dB), corresponding to moderate-to-severe hearing loss classifications (World Health Organization, 2021), who are among the disadvantaged groups in Turkey. The research sample consists of a total of 87 hearing-impaired athletes, 42 males and 45 females, aged between 19 and 36 years (mean age = 22.6 ± 2.63). While most of the data was collected in person, data was also collected via an online form. For the face-to-face and online application, the declaration of consent was submitted in writing.

Instruments for Data Collection

In addition to the personal information form prepared by the researcher, the "Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS)" developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted into Turkish by Dağlı and Baysal was used as a data collection instrument.

Personal questionnaire: The personal information form was prepared by the researchers to determine the demographic characteristics of the individuals participating in the study.

Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS):the "Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS)" was developed by Diener et al. (1985) to measure the life satisfaction of individuals. The Turkish version was examined for validity and reliability by Dağlı and Baysal (2016). This scale consists of 5 items and uses a 5-point Likert format. Participants answer the statements between 1 and 5 as follows: 1=disagree completely, 2=agree completely, 3=agree somewhat, 4=agree completely, 5=agree completely. The items are rated with 1 to 7 points and the scale results in an overall value between 5 and 35 points. People with a high level of life satisfaction achieve a high score, people with a low level of life satisfaction a low score. The Cronbach alpha value of the scale was given as 0.78.

Data Analysis

The data obtained was transferred to the SPSS 23.0 package program and prepared for analysis. The coefficients for kurtosis and skewness were used to determine whether the variables were normally distributed. It was determined that the data is normally distributed. To test whether there was a significant difference in the scale values according to the demographic variables of the participants, t-test and ANOVA were used as parametric test methods. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests.

Findings

Table 1. Demographic information on participants

Demographic Variable	Subgroup	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Woman	45	51.7
	Male	42	48.3
	Total	87	100.0
Age	19-36	87 ($\bar{x}=22.06$)	100.0
How Do You Utilize Your Monthly Income?	Good	26	29.9
	Middle	55	63.2
	Bad	6	6.9
	Total	87	100.00

If we look at the table, we see that 45 of them are female (51.7%), 42 of them are male (48.3%), their average age is 22.06 years, the age range is between 19 and 36 years, and depending on how they rate their monthly income, 26 of them rate it as good, 55 as medium and 6 as bad.

Table 2. Demographic information table for participants' participation in ecocreative activities

Demographic Variable	Subgroup	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Are you participating in the Ecorecreative Event?	Yes	40	46.0
	No	47	54.0
	Total	87	100.0
How Does Your Participation	Good.	48	55.2

in Ecocreative Events Make You Feel?	Bad	0	0
	Undecided	39	44.8
	Total	87	100.0

When analyzing Table 2, 40 (46.0%) of the participants stated that they had participated in ecocreative activities, while 47 (54.0%) stated that they had not. When asked how participating in ecocreative activities made them feel, 48 (55.2%) of the participants said they felt good, while 39 (44.8%) were undecided.

Table 3. Independent groups T test table for the total scale score according to the variable of participation in ecocreative activities

Dimension	Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	P
Satisfaction with Life Scale Total Score	Yes	40	16.0250	3.1984	85	2.203	0.030*
	No	47	14.3404	3.8293			

p<0,05

If we look at Table 3, the life satisfaction scale scores of the participants were evaluated according to their participation in eco-creative activities. It was found that the athletes who participated in eco-creative activities had higher mean scores for life satisfaction than those who did not participate, and this situation is statistically significant (p<0.05).

Table 4. Independent groups T test table for total scale score according to gender variable

Dimension	Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	P
Satisfaction with Life Scale Total Score	Famale	45	15.2667	3.9335	85	0.401	0.689
	Male	42	14.9524	3.3199			

p<0,05

In the analysis of Table 4, the values of the participants on the life satisfaction scale were analysed according to the gender variable. No statistical significance was found in the mean values of the scale depending on the gender variable (p>0.05).

Table 5. One way anova table regarding the total scale scores according to the emotional state of participation in ecocreative activities

	Sum of Ranks	df	Mean Rank	F	P
Within Group	40,336	2	20.168	1.548	0.219
Between Groups	1094,515	84	13.030		
Total	1134.851	86			

p<0,05

When Table 5 is analysed, it is found that there is no statistical significance ($p>0.05$) regarding the mean values of the participants in relation to the emotional state of participation in ecocreative activities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to investigate and interpret the life satisfaction of hearing-impaired athletes participating in eco-creative activities. The results of the study show that the athletes who participated in ecocreative activities have a higher life satisfaction than the athletes who did not participate.

The literature states that people who participate in sports activities are justifiably proud of the fact that they reduce their stress, gain self-confidence and feel fitter. In this vein, participation in activities is an important point for both increasing life satisfaction and feeling better mentally (Toy et al., 2020).

Tarakçı and Kaplan (2006) conducted a study in which they emphasized the importance and benefits of participating in social activities for hearing impaired people. In the study, it was emphasized that the participation of hearing impaired people in social activities enables them to express themselves better, develop a better sense of responsibility and understand others better. Therefore, a person who feels better about themselves and communicates better with others is very likely to achieve life satisfaction. If we look at your research result, the fact that athletes who participate in eco-creative activities have higher life satisfaction on average than those who do not participate shows that my two researches support each other. On the other hand, Jones et al. (2019) emphasized that the quality of life, life satisfaction and feelings of loneliness of hearing-impaired people who were physically active (walks, etc.) increased and their feelings of loneliness decreased. This shows that hearing-impaired people who establish a relationship with the outside world can have higher life satisfaction.

From another perspective, it has been emphasized that eco-creative activities, which are thought to support active communication training aimed at improving communication skills in social relationships (effective communication with body language and gestures, empathy, improving active listening skills), help hearing-impaired individuals to cope with the problems caused by hearing loss (Oberg et al., 2014). It is known that people who can understand the ability to cope with problems achieve higher life satisfaction (Demir, 2019).

To summarize, participation in ecorecreative activities plays an important role in increasing life satisfaction for hearing-impaired athletes. Social workers can play an important role in organizing such activities and encouraging hearing-impaired athletes to participate in these activities. In this way, the social integration and overall quality of life of hearing-impaired athletes can be improved. A review of the literature shows that academic studies in the field of recreational activities and life satisfaction of hearing-impaired people are quite limited, that the studies conducted mostly concern non-disabled people and that hearing-impaired athletes are not used as a study sample. For this reason, it is important that our study represents a new source in this field. The results of the study show that hearing-impaired athletes who participate in eco-creative activities in nature have a high level of life satisfaction. In this context, it shows that increasing the areas for recreational activities that can be associated with nature is an important point with regard to hearing-impaired athletes, disadvantaged individuals and others.

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