

## LEISURE TIME AND HEALTH

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Leisure time is the time when the individual is free of all sorts of obligations and chooses by his own how to use the time left.

**Purpose:** The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of free time on human health.

**Material-Method:** An extensive review of the recent literature was performed via Medline database and the Hellenic Academic Libraries Association (HEAL-Link), using the following keywords: leisure time, health, health promotion, and a combination of them.

**Results:** Leisure time often acts as a remedy in various cases. It has been shown that participation in leisure activities can lead to physical and mental health. Recent studies take into account indicators covering a wide range of social welfare considerations. Dealing with activities that give pleasant emotions to a person suffering from a disease can be beneficial in trying to overcome it.

**Conclusions:** Leisure is of great importance in human life. An individual, during his spare time, can engage himself in activities resulting in his personal cultivation and his spiritual elevation.

**Keywords:** leisure time, health, health promotion and a combination of them.

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## Introduction

Leisure time is the time when the individual is free of all sorts of duties and chooses by his own how to use the time left. (Karagianni, 2015) It is the time when the person chooses how to allocate himself and during that time he has the opportunity to be himself and participate in activities he prefers. Detachment from work and duty became the definition of leisure time. (Cordes, 2013) In fact, leisure time is the only thing that remains when the person has fulfilled all his duties, such as work, homework or reading and has satisfied all of his basic needs, such as sleeping and eating. (Beliviani, 2013)

However, the distinction between leisure and work is not considered as simple, since in some cases people work without being remunerated (e.g. volunteers) due to the satisfaction they gain from their participation. On the other side, the unpaid household is certainly not a leisure activity, since it includes the element of the obligation. (Goodin, Rice, Bittman, & Saunders, 2005)

Leisure time is also a concept that varies between cultures. It also varies according to social situation, historical period and culture. Some people think that leisure time is freedom from work. Some others see it as a social control tool or a social status symbol, while others believe it is just a state of rest. Furthermore, free time can be considered as a desirable situation rather than a pleasant experience. (Deffer, 2013)

Many times the concept of leisure time is confused with that of entertainment, which aims at relieving and removing the individual from the pressure of everyday life. The concept of recreation also often appears to be confused with the term of leisure. Leisure time is a wider term that includes recreation which along with fun and entertainment are factors contributing to it. (Karagianni, 2015) Leisure time also contributes to the promotion of people's health and good quality of life in general, as it is a factor influencing it and in combination with other factors may have positive or negative effects. (Deffer, 2013 & Psatha, Defner, 2012)

**The purpose** of this review is to study the literature regarding the contribution of leisure time to the promotion of human health. In particular, the importance of leisure time and some elements of the concept are presented, as well as the activities that can be developed during it and their association with health.

## Methods

An extensive review of the recent literature was performed via Medline database and the Hellenic Academic Libraries Association (HEAL-Link), using the following keywords: leisure time, health, health promotion, and a combination of them. Criterion for exclusion of articles was the language except Greek and English.

## The importance of leisure time

Leisure is a wider term that includes cultural, touristic, sports and leisure activities. (Deffer, 2013) In antiquity, Aristotle was one of the first who worked and talked freely about leisure time. According to the ancient Greek philosopher, leisure time is the availability of time and the absence of the necessity to be busy. This absence leads to a life of reflection and actual truth (Vogel, 2001) According to Aristotle, leisure is also achieved in three levels: meditation, recreation and entertainment. (Cordes, 2013)

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Another ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, believed that the problem of leisure time was set only for children and young people. The rest of the time was being shared between rituals and work. He believed that people should devote most of their leisure time to the propitiation of gods and the rest of time to games. (Beliviani, 2013)

In England, free time is called 'leisure', which comes from the Latin word *licere* and means 'to be allowed' or 'to be free'. In France, leisure is called 'loisir', in America 'non working time', in Germany, 'musse' or 'freizeit', and in Italy free time is given to the term 'tempo libero'.

In Portugal, it is seen as 'lazer' and is replaced by 'folga', which is interpreted as free time or 'horas vagas' as remaining time. In Spain, free time is called 'ocio' and generally indicates leisure time. (Mihalopoulou, 2006)

The concept of leisure time has to include three basic functions (Oishi, & Lucas, 2003):

- The operation of rest
- The entertainment function
- The function of further development and personality.

The trainee probably, after taking part, needs time to rest, but rest is not entertainment. This raises the issue of the correct allocation of leisure time.

Furthermore, activities that are included in leisure time may be informal and specialized, ie leisure activities, such as game and occupations requiring special skills respectively. (Chatzimanouil, Glynia, & Smernou, 2010) Additionally, leisure time has different dimensions and versions and is categorized according to the activities carried out and the procedure followed, as below (Kouthouris, 2001):

- Criterion 1: How the participant engages in activities
- Criterion 2: Participant's contribution to production or consumption of activity (e.g. gambling)
- Criterion 3: Whether the activities involved are of free choice
- Criterion 4: The control exercised by the participant in the final goal of the activity.

The needs of people for leisure time are divided into 8 (eight) categories depended on the characteristics of the individual. These are (Papanastasiou, 2009):

- Need for rest, relaxation and well-being (recreation)
- Need for balancing, emotional discharging and fun (discharging)
- Need for knowledge, training and instruction (education)
- Need for reasoning, collecting experiences and becoming acquainted with oneself (self-knowledge)
- Need for information, social contacts and sociability (communication)
- Need for grouping, social direction and collective learning experience (integration)
- Need for participation, identification with others and engagement (participation)
- Need for creative development of life, cultural activities and productivity (civilization)

The satisfaction of these needs can be achieved through activities during leisure time, in which the involvement of the stakeholders can be active, ie activities that have to do with physical movement, such



as sport. These activities can take place in gyms and sports facilities. The participation of the individual can also be both interactive and passive, as it happens in cinema. (Beliviani, 2013 & Mihalopoulou, 2006)

### **Leisure time and health**

Leisure time is a component of utmost importance to human health. Recent studies take into account indicators covering a wide range of social welfare considerations. For example, in a study on numerous Spanish provinces, researchers took into account indicators such as health and health services as well as indicators such as cultural and recreational opportunities, coexistence and participation, and citizen's security. (Karagianni, 2015)

Leisure time often acts as a remedy in various cases. More specifically, as mentioned above, it has been shown that participation in leisure activities is quite beneficial to physical and mental health. (Kourkouta, Prokopiou & Iliadis, 2016) Dealing with activities that give pleasant emotions to a person suffering from a disease can be beneficial in trying to overcome it. It is understood, therefore, that "leisure time can be seen as a matter of quality of life and public health". (Syracoulis, 2009)

The allocation of leisure time in various activities seems to have a significant impact on people's lives. Passive activities, such as watching television, have been linked to heart disease. (Burazeri, Goda, & Kark, 2008) On the contrary, active activities seem to prevent or contribute to the treatment of a series of physical and mental illnesses. (Kourkouta, Iliadis & Monios, 2015)

However, despite the obvious benefits, it seems that the participation of people in active leisure activities is problematic. (Azaka, 2009) Thus, despite the proven beneficial effects of exercise on patients suffering from coronary artery disease, only 46% of them is active enough to gain the benefit and those who participate in an exercise program leave it within the first six months. (Thompson & Lim, 2003 & Berger, Pargman & Weinberg, 2002)

However, the necessity of leisure time is understandable, as it allows the individual to escape from everyday life, and to develop his sociality. Leisure is an important parameter of people's health as its benefits can contribute to higher living standards and it can also be a therapeutic tool. (Karagianni, 2015 & Andereck, Valentine, Vogt & Knopf, 2007)

Leisure time, therefore, is an important element of individual's everyday life, as it contributes, by its activities, to the detachment from everyday duties as well as to physical and mental health, sociability, contact with nature and contact with culture and arts. (Beutell, 2006 & Kourkouta, Rarra, Mavroeidi & Prodromidis, 2014)

In a society where infrastructure affects the daily life and the health of its citizens, negative results, such as urban gaps, can be produced. On the other hand, a properly designed network of public spaces will bring positive results on human's health. (Boley, 2001 & Ziogou, Fradelos & Kourkouta, 2015)

### **Conclusions**

Leisure time is a very important element of human life. It is the time spent away from job and homework. It is a distinct time before or after our basic needs and forced activities, such as eating, sleeping and working. It is the realm of freedom. In his leisure time, an individual can be involved in activities that

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result in his personal cultivation and his spiritual elevation through discussion, study, thinking, through the search for knowledge, dialectics, political and cultural enlightenment. (Samaras, Kotsidou, Iliadis, Iakovidis, Prodromidis & Koukourikos, 2015)

An individual can also deal with recreational activities, sports, physical activities, as well as entertainment and play. Common point of all these activities is joy, pleasure and offered satisfaction, necessary feelings in everyday life.

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