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Leisure Experience among Students Seeking Counseling Help

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Abstract

The study aims to underline the benefit of leisure in maintaining and restoring psychological wellbeing. Pattern of leisure and its relation to mental health and life satisfaction was investigated on 30 university students who sought mental health counseling. A structured leisure related questionnaire [1], Bangla version GHQ-12 [2] and SWLS [3] were used. The findings highlighted the importance of incorporating mindful-practice of leisure activities that promote interrelatedness.

Keywords: Leisure; Counseling; Mental health.

1. Introduction

Leisure is an act of having and spending one's free time; away from the demands of work or duty. Intrinsically, leisure is a mental and spiritual attitude and not simply the inevitable result of external factors, such as spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation [4].

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The positive energy gained from enjoying leisure time contributes to our physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing. It provides opportunities to escape from the daily life hassle, as well as, helps us to face the negative events in life and be happy.

Researchers have recognized multiple benefits of leisure for all ages and cultures as well as the need for leisure for human beings. Positive relationship with leisure and life satisfaction had been reported by nearly all studies [5,6,7,8,9,10]. Affirmative impact of leisure activity on personal need satisfaction, confidence and happiness among elderly was maintained [10]. Argument in favor of leisure in improving confidence, physical health and maintaining social relationship was put forward [11,12]. Leisure activities had been therapeutic in contributing to quality of life and personal development of people suffering from brain conditions [13,14,15] and with physical disability [16]. There are some types of leisure, such as social leisure, that are more satisfying than others [17].

In Bangladesh, importance of leisure for sound mental health and life satisfaction was noted in this study. Despite poverty, hard work and everyday struggle women in hilly area have their own ways of enjoying leisure and recreation [18].

The aim of this paper is to present some empirical findings on the leisure experience of students seeking help of psychological counseling. It will enrich our understanding of leisure in general and possible contribution of leisure to meet the challenges of enhancing coping, increase prevention, and reverting psychological dysfunction.

2. Method

2.1 Participants: Present study consisted of 30 university students' age range 20-25 years. Distributions of sample were 10 (33.3%) male and 20 (66.7%) female. The respondents were taken from a public and a private university within same locality. Purposive sampling technique was used to select sample from those who sought counseling service urgently. Those who agreed to participate were included in the study. Their education level ranged from graduation to masters and their socio economic status was middle to upper.

2.2 Questionnaire: Leisure related questionnaire developed by author was used to find out the nature and satisfaction of leisure. There were 29 items related to concept, importance, need, activity, sharing, and satisfaction of leisure. A personal information form was used to collect necessary demographic data.

To measure mental health and life satisfaction, Bangla adaptation of Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and Mental Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) were used.

2.3 Procedure: Researcher approached those who urgently sought counselling help with a request to participate and explained the purpose of the research. The questionnaires were administered

individually to those who gave consent. Subjective account of the respondents’ reaction to study questionnaire was also taken into consideration for qualitative exploration. The average time required for the completion of each questionnaire was 10 to 15 minutes. Respondents were thanked for their valuable contribution.

3. Results and Discussion

Obtained findings showed that though 76.7% of the respondent considered leisure as “tensionless, disturbance less and enjoyable period of time”, spontaneous reaction of respondents to the study questionnaire revealed lack of clear conception of leisure as ‘free time activity’.

“Free time activity!! What’s that? I have a routine life. I am maintaining the same routine for the last ten years.”

Likewise, figure 1 indicates that, only 10% felt the need of daily leisure and 30% at least in a week.

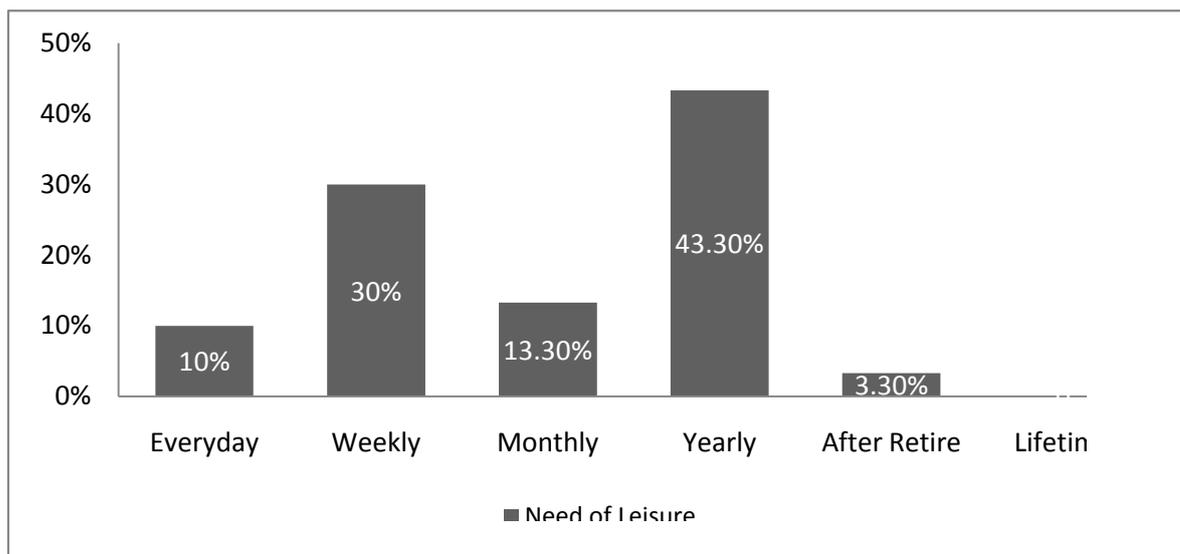


Figure 1: Percentage indicating “need of leisure” in time:

The necessity of leisure in life was put into question by the help seekers. One of the participant retorted - *“Is leisure necessary in our life?”* Respondents were not mindful about the importance and benefit of leisure (Box 1)

Box 1: Excerpt from subjective account of respondents on importance of leisure in life:

One participant said: “Well it’s something we don’t do normally? I’d prefer to be with my friends, going out every day is necessary in my everyday life”.

Another responded: “You know; visiting my village yearly makes me feel good”.

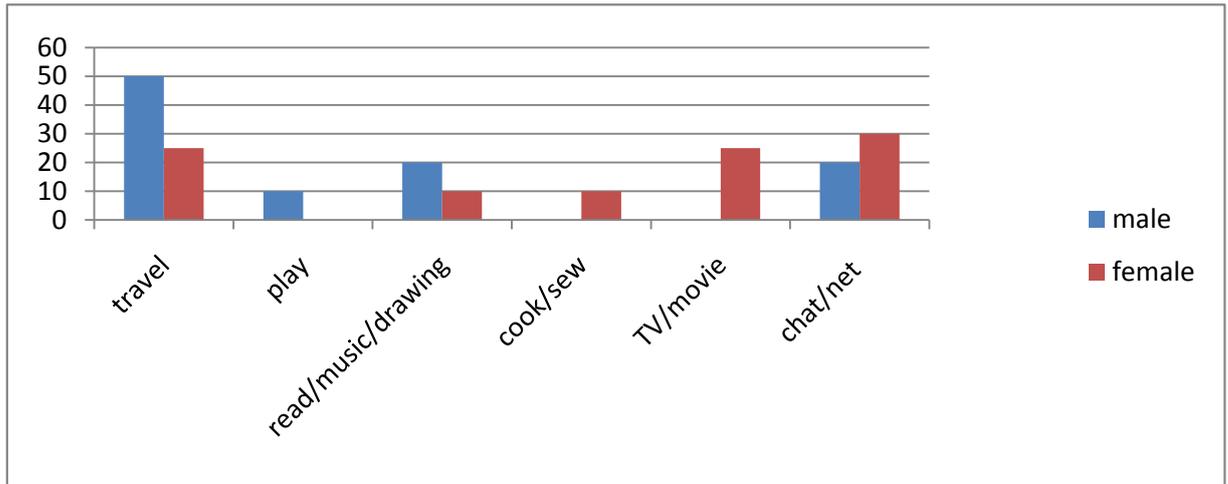


Figure 2: First choice of leisure activity of male and female respondents

The choice of leisure activity (Figure 2) clearly shows gender differences. Only female opted for watching TV or movies, cooking, and music while play was chosen only by male respondent. Interestingly more females preferred computer networking as leisure activity. Traveling was the first choice for both genders, but it was more preferred by males. Chatting and computer networking were more favored by female respondents. Some respondents even considered sleeping at night and lying in bed as leisure activity when probed about most preferred choice. It also revealed that a few were involved in social work, club or community organization.

Present research found that 80% wants to share leisure with close friends, next was family members and with own self. Low preference (6.7%) for own family i.e., spouse and children may be because the sample was unmarried.

Table 1: Preferred choice for sharing leisure time

Share with	Frequency	Percent
Own self	21	70.0
Spouse	2	6.7
Children	2	6.7
Family members	21	70.0
Close friends	24	80.0

Table 2: Type of satisfaction attained by leisure

Types of satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Get energy	2	6.7
Remove tiredness	2	6.7
Remove tension	18	60.0
Remove depression	8	26.7
Total	30	100.0

Interesting finding is that 60% said that leisure is helpful to remove tension but only 6.7 % said it gave energy or removed tiredness. Apparently, it helped to remove depression only for 26.7%.

Study finding indicates that majority was not satisfied with leisure and no significant correlation was found with life satisfaction (.24) and mental health (-.23). Nevertheless significant high negative correlation was found between life satisfaction and poor mental health (-.85; $p < .01$).

Obtained results demonstrated lack of clear understanding and mindfulness involvement of leisure activity among the psychological help seekers. Leisure time physical activities were found to have a consistent relationship with psychological and physical well-being [19]. But 10% and only male respondents had chosen it. Moreover, participation in community based activities was absent and self-motivating activities such as drawing, reading, listening to music; sewing, cooking etc. was only 10-20%. Positive impact of community based and self-motivated activities on health and satisfaction is also well documented. Proximal sociocultural conditions and processes not only influence what people do but also how they feel while acting and as a consequence of acting. Similarly autonomous motivation was also found to be reliably related to psychological health [19]; [20].

Preference of sharing with family members (70%) and close friends (80%) clearly indicated an inherent need for social relationship. In contrast, majority of the respondent selected traveling as their first choice. Travelling involves cost and planning; hence cannot avail readily. This corresponds with 43% choice for yearly need of leisure.

Leisure brings a balance between the stress of life and wellness and consequent positive impact on psychological wellbeing leading to better performance and productivity was evident in introductory citation of previous study findings. Obtained finding compatibly indicated positive impact of leisure in removing tension (60%) and depression (26.7%), however in terms of better enactment only 6.7% respondents felt energized. This parallels the Self Determination Theory (STD) which propagated for intrinsic motivation and well-internalized extrinsic motivation for satisfaction of the basic

psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. The theory proposed for facilitating social context that support peoples inherent activity will promote optimal motivation and yield the most positive psychological development and behavioral outcomes [21].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings highlighted the need of leisure opportunities and experiences with potential leisure satisfaction in enhancing life satisfaction among people with psychological distress. Further discussion can center on potential contribution of introducing therapeutic recreation as an intervention to bring positive changes in their life. Practical focus on policies aimed at leisure literacy to increase participation in leisure activities in youth may also play a vital role in improving psychological wellbeing under adverse life conditions.

4.1 Limitations: 1. Sample size was small.

2. It seems that clients had not clear concept of leisure which was affected the output

3. The study was carried out only two places, future studies with a large representative sample is suggested.

4. Clients had some difficulties to understand the terms and words meaning in details.

5. Resources were limited.

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