Aging and Leisure: An Introduction

Objectives

- We will understand different theories of aging.
- We will understand some general patterns of leisure participation among older adults.

Early theories idea about aging

- Crisis
- Disengagement
- Activity
- Continuity

Crisis theory: Retirement results in the loss of valued work roles.

- Many people believe that work justifies recreation.
- Major task during retirement, then, is to find some other justification for leisure.

Disengagement theory: People naturally withdraw from wider world around them.

- Individual finds disengagement satisfying.
- Society encourages disengagement by gradually transferring functions previously performed by older adults to the young.

Activity theory: People who remain active are happy, satisfied, and content.

- Disengagement is not desirable.
- Successful aging involves doing things that are meaningful and being with others.

Continuity theory: Retirement is not necessarily problematic because people maintain other roles.

- Work roles and leisure roles need not be antagonistic.
- Interests from middle age may be continued during retirement years; other interests may also be adopted or “revisited.”
- Continuity helps people cope with change and dealing with negative life events.
Recent theories idea about aging

- Selective optimization with compensation
- Socioemotional selectivity
- Geotranscendance

Selective optimization with compensation: Successful aging involves minimizing losses and maximizing gains.

- Selection involves narrowing (or focusing) on things that are most important.
- People compensate by adapting activities and skills to circumstances.
- Constraints prevent people from narrowing their focus.

Socioemotional selectivity: Successful aging involves a narrowing of social interactions and networks.

- This theory suggests there is practical value in decreasing the size of one’s social circle.
- People limit interaction to close friends and loves ones since they are more likely to provide what is needed form social interaction.
- Constraints prevent people from being with loved ones.

Geotranscendance: Successful aging involves decreased emphasis on the self and material things.

- People become altruistic and are increasingly interested in the welfare of others.
- Social interaction may become less important.
- Constraints may be beneficial as they help people develop a transcendent world view.

General Points Regarding Leisure and Older Adults

- Historically, leisure involvement has found to be lowest during later life.
- Many activities pursued earlier in life are abandoned.
- There is a transition from physical activities to activities that demand less physical effort.

Non-use of local parks by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-group</th>
<th>% do not use parks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-35</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-55</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-75</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-95</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-use of locally sponsored recreation programs by age

Percentage of Texans who do not participate in outdoor recreation away from home

General Points Regarding Leisure and Older Adults

These findings suggest that there is a narrowing of the leisure repertoire over time.

Leisure repertoire can be defined as the “total number of leisure activities a person perceives s/he is capable of participating in at a given stage of his or her life.”

Leisure Repertoire Across the Life Span (Iso-Ahola, 1990)

Leisure repertoire may narrow due to:
- Psychological/biological need for increasing structure and permanence, and limited need for novelty and arousal.

Relative strength of need for novelty and familiarity throughout the life span
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General Points Regarding Leisure and Older Adults

Narrow leisure repertoire may be due to:
- Biological and related constraints: declining health and physical abilities, fear of crime, loss of loved one
- Differential treatment by leisure service agencies.
- Age-related norms.
- Concentration of interests in activities that are regarded as important.
- Cohort differences (generational effects) may result in different patterns of leisure involvement for future generations.

Percent Who Stated a Factor Was a Very Important Constraint to Park Visitation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>25-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family commitments</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of crime</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one to go with</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor health</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No way to get to parks</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1991 Telephone Survey

% of park visitors who reported visiting park daily or almost daily (by age)

Source: In-park Survey, 1991