

A Survey of Leisure Activities that the Elderly Desire

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore both the indoor and outdoor activities that the elderly desire. This study employed a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with people aged 50 years and older in Bangkok, Pratum Thani, Samut Pragarn and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya provinces. The sample size was 185.

The study showed that the outdoor activities that the elderly preferred were walking in the water, stretching activities and walking. The indoor activities that they preferred were muscle, brain and mind development. The most preferred outdoor activity of the elderly was walking in the water, while their favorite indoor activity was muscle development.

Keywords: activities, the elderly

Introduction

Population ageing is already a challenge. Many countries in the world have ageing societies. In 1990, the share of people older than 60 years was around 9.2% and this increased to 11.7% in 2013. It is estimated that this number will grow to 21.1% in 2050, for example, in China, Taiwan, Japan, German, and Hong Kong. Another estimate is that the world's elderly will increase by 60% in fifteen years. In 2030, total number of elderly people in the world will be around 1,000 million persons. It will increase to 1,600 million persons in 2050, as shown in Table 1 (United Nations, 2015).

Table 1 Total number of adults older than 65 years in 2016, 2030 and 2050

Year	Total Population (persons)			Population over 65 years (persons)			Population over 65 years (%)		
	total	male	female	Total	male	female	total	male	female
2016	7,253.3	3,652.0	3,601.3	617.1	274.9	342.2	8.5	7.5	9.5
2030	8,315.8	4,176.7	4,139.1	998.7	445.2	553.4	12.0	10.7	13.4
2050	9,376.4	4,681.7	4,694.7	1,565.8	698.5	867.3	16.7	14.6	18.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013; International Database

Thailand and Singapore will be the first group in Southeast Asia (SEA) in which the elderly will increase from 10% to 20%. Other countries will also increase at a rapid rate (Table 2).

Table 2 Years in which the proportion of the elderly will increase from 10% to 20% in SEA

Country	Number of years in which the proportion of elderly will increase from 10% to 20%
Cambodia (2022-2047)	25
Brunei (2017-2030)	13
Laos (2036-2057)	21
Indonesia (2019-2045)	26
Myanmar (2018-2587)	26
Malaysia (2018-2044)	26
Philippines (2033-2073)	40
Singapore (1997-2019)	22
Thailand (2007-2021)	14
Vietnam (2013-2033)	20

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision (<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>)

Leisure activities (LA) can be defined as activities in which people engage during their free time. Engagement in leisure activities has been found highly beneficial to the elderly (Pressman et al., 2009, cited in Sala et al., 2019). Such activities help older adults to preserve their cognitive and physical function, as well as mental health. They thus contribute to successful ageing (Sala et al., 2019). Activities engagement is related to mental health as well. Mental health aspects such as wellbeing and life satisfaction have been found to positively correlate with LA engagement in several studies (Paggi et al., 2016, cited in Sala et al., 2019). The health benefits of such activities are also well documented and include lowered risk of disability (James, Boyle, Buchman, & Bennett, 2011 cited in Holtfreter et al., 2017). An understanding of how older adults conceptualize healthy ageing and meeting the needs of the elderly are important for the development of policies, programs, and services designed to promote health. This may help with development of health-related policies, programs, and services that promote healthy ageing, and consequently, reduce health care system costs. The current study aimed to examine the leisure activities that the elderly desire which can support sustainability in the health of older persons in their successful ageing.

Literature review

In a super-aged society, older people with reduced physical and sensory functions make up the majority of the population. Efforts must be made to prepare the urban environment, housing, and household equipment and appliances so that these people can live safely and comfortably. Collings (2001) revealed the perspective of successful old age was not one necessarily characterized by good health, but rather by an individual's ability to successfully cope with declining health.

The study of Kwok Yan Chi Jackie (2013) projected the living environment for an ageing society. In the case of Hong Kong, he studied daily life and the quality of life in Hong Kong by interviewing 50 older persons aged between 60-79 years. The study showed that when the elderly have good financial means, ageing is not an obstacle, while the poorer have more difficulty and often fall into depression. Gunnarsson (2009) did small focus group interviews of healthy older persons. The results show economic growth and good welfare affect the health of the elderly. Depression in later life is also associated with reduced social and leisure activities (Victor, Scambler, Bond, & Bowling, 2000; Zhang & Li, 2011 cited in Holtfreter et al., 2017). Some of the more dire consequences of depression in late adulthood, such inactivity, adversely affect one's overall wellbeing and successful ageing. Over the past several decades, researchers have consistently demonstrated that reduced social activity results in a wide array of negative consequences, including increased isolation and reduced health Holtfreter et al., 2017. Researchers have also shown that sustained social and leisure activities can promote overall wellbeing and successful ageing (Moos et al., 2006). As noted above, one potentially harmful outcome stemming from depression is decreased participation in social and leisure activities. There is also evidence for a reverse causal chain in that lack of social activity may be a precursor to depression. Successful ageing is best characterized by the concurrent presence of three dimensions, namely high cognitive and physical function, low probability of disease and disability, and active engagement in life Rowe and Kahn (1987) cited in Sala, 2019. The study of Sala et al. (2019) shows that active engagement in leisure activities can help older adults to maintain cognitive, physical, and mental health.

2. Research Methodology

This study collected survey data from interviews conducted among healthy people in three age groups, 50-60 years, 61-70 years, and 71 years and older. Interviews were done in a public park as well as in public and private homes for the elderly in Bangkok, Prathum Thani, Samut Pragn and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. The interviews were conducted from March to May of 2018. Data collected comprised purposive sampling among the aged. There were 185 samples, interviewing 50-60 year olds (144 samples), 61-70 year olds (28 samples) and people 71 years and older (13 samples). Questionnaire responses used a three-point Likert scale implemented to assess the respondents' opinions of leisure activities. Then, a weighted average index (WAI) (Black and Champion, 1976) was applied to develop the results. WAI values of 0.00 – 0.33 indicate less interest, while 0.34 – 0.66 show more interest, and 0.67 – 1.00 indicate the most interest. These elders were sorted by their desired activities on the basis gender and age.

3. Results of the Study

From basic data, most people sampled were females aged between 50-60 years that are married with two children. Among this group, 46% completed a bachelor's degree, while 41% held master's degrees. Most of them were employed by private companies with salaries of more than 50,000 baht per month (Table 3).

Table 3 Basic data

(n= 185)

Data	Number	Percent
1. Gender		
Male	57	31
Female	128	69
2. Age (years)		
50-60	144	78
61-70	28	15
71-80	11	6
More than 81	2	1
3. Education		
Senior secondary	20	11
Bachelor's degree	86	46
Master's degree	75	41
Doctoral degree	4	2
4. Status		
Single	58	31
Married	103	56
Widowed/Divorced	24	13
5. Occupation (age 50-60 years)		
State enterprise employee	19	14
Private company employee	53	37
Personal business/self-employed	41	28
Civil service	28	19
Maid	3	2
6. Former Occupation (over 61 years)		
State enterprise employee	4	10
Private company employee	13	32
Personal business/self-employed	5	12
Civil service	16	39
Maid	3	7
7. Income of age 50-60 years (baht per month)		
Less than 10,000 baht	3	2
10,000-20,000	7	5
20,000-30,000	14	10
30,000-40,000	27	19
40,000-50,000	14	10
Over 50,000	79	54
8. Income (age over 60 years in baht per month)		
Less than 10,000 baht	10	24
10,000-20,000	11	27
20,000-30,000	1	2
30,000-40,000	3	8
40,000-50,000	5	12
Over 50,000	11	27
9. Number of Children		
0	74	40
1	34	18
2	58	31
3	18	10
More than 3	1	1

The three most desired indoor and outdoor leisure activities were, in descending order, swimming, muscle development activities and stretching activities. The most popular outdoor activities were swimming, stretching activities and sports. The indoor activities that they desired were muscle, brain and mental development activities, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Ranking of indoor and outdoor leisure activities that the elderly desire

Desired leisure activities	WAI
Outdoor leisure activities	
Sports	0.6526
Gardening	0.6224
Offsite travel	0.4685
Bicycle riding	0.4919
Stretching activities such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Dance	0.6602
Swimming	0.6785
Total	0.5957
Indoor leisure activities	
Mental development activities such as singing, music lessons	0.6215
Muscle development activities such as drawing, fitness, dance	0.6731
Activities for brain development such as chess, playing cards, playing games	0.6340
Other activities such as cooking classes	0.5625
Relaxing massages, spa treatments	0.6054
Lectures for mental stimulation	0.4359
Participate in discussions and exchange opinions	0.5423
Total	0.5821

WAI = 0.00 – 0.33 = less interest, 0.34 – 0.66 = more interest, 0.67 – 1.00 = most interest

The study found that males and females were interested in the same indoor and outdoor activities, but overall, females had a greater rate of participation than males. Outdoor activities like swimming or walking in water and stretching activities were popular, while indoor activities such as muscle development, mental development, relaxing massages and spa treatments were sought after. Males were not interested in lectures for mental stimulation and cooking classes, while females did not prefer these lectures or participation in discussions and exchange of opinions (Table 5).

Table 5 Ranking desired leisure activities on the basis of gender

Desired leisure activities	Gender	
	Male (n=57)	Female (n=128)
	WAI	WAI
Outdoor leisure activities		
Sports	0.6422	0.6599
Gardening	0.6264	0.6210
Offsite travel service	0.4583	0.4722
Bicycle riding	0.4762	0.5000
Stretching activities such as Yoga, Tai Chi, Dance	0.6618	0.6596
Swimming	0.6759	0.6799
Total	0.5901	0.5988
Indoor leisure activities		
Mental Development activities such as singing, music lessons	0.6081	0.6276
Muscle development activities such as drawing, fitness, dance	0.6742	0.6725
Activities for brain development such as chess, playing cards, playing games	0.6856	0.5948
Other activities such as cooking classes	0.3958	0.5958
Relaxing massages, spa treatments	0.5256	0.6242
Lectures for mental stimulation	0.3810	0.4561
Participate in discussions and exchange opinions	0.5278	0.5481
Total	0.5426	0.5885

WAI = 0.00 – 0.33 = less, 0.34 – 0.66 = more interest, 0.67 – 1.00 = most interest

The elderly generally liked the same indoor and outdoor activities regardless of their age. The current study found that they became more interest in walking in water as their age increased. Activities in which they had low interest as their age increased were participation in discussions and exchanging opinions as well as relaxing massages and spa treatments (Table 6).

Table 6 Ranking desired leisure activities on the basis of age

Desired leisure activities	Age (year)		
	50-60 (n=144)	61-70 (n=28)	over 70 Ā (n=13)
	WAI	WAI	WAI
Outdoor leisure activities			
Sports	0.6494	0.6667	0.6458
Gardening	0.6431	0.4630	0.5000
Offsite travel	0.4823	0.3810	0.5000
Bicycle riding	0.4810	0.5556	0.5556
Stretching activities such as Yoga, Tai Chi,			
Dance	0.6618	0.6917	0.5278
Swimming	0.6455	0.7143	0.9048
Total	0.5939	0.5787	0.6057
Indoor leisure activities			
Mental development activities such as singing, music lessons	0.6178	0.6491	0.5952
Muscle development activities such as drawing, fitness, dance	0.6386	0.7727	0.8571
Activities for brain development such as chess, playing cards, playing games	0.6447	0.5833	0.6458
Other activities such as cooking classes	0.5650	0.5000	0.6111
Relaxing massages, spa treatments	0.6415	0.4815	0.4722
Lecturers for stimulation	0.4352	0.3333	0.5417
Participate in discussions and exchange opinions	0.5621	0.4792	0.4167
Total	0.5864	0.5427	0.5914

WAI of 0.00 – 0.33 = less interest, 0.34 – 0.66 = more interest, 0.67 – 1.00 = most interest

Discussion and Recommendations

From the study, swimming, stretching and muscle development activities are the best activities for healthy ageing. Activities for the elderly are very important to enable them to successfully cope with declining health (Collings, 2001). Lack of activity will increase isolation and reduce health. Furthermore, lack of social activity may be a precursor to depression (Moos, et al., 2006). Leisure activities can help older adults to maintain their cognitive, physical, and mental health (Sala et al., 2019). The government should develop policies supporting activities for the elderly. Gunnarsson (2009) points out that good welfare is arises from many activities for the elderly, promoting their good health. Home care both, private and public, should be concerned with and provide indoor and outdoor activities such as swimming, drawing, yoga, and game

playing, among others. This is to develop both physical and mental health in the advanced years of our elderly citizens.

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