

## **Recreation and its Health Benefits: A Critical Review**

<sup>1</sup>Akhere Ibhafidon, <sup>\*2</sup>Okechukwu K. Oforka, <sup>1</sup>Nonye M. Onuzulike and <sup>1</sup>Chinenye J. Nwaobiala

<sup>1</sup>Department of Health Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

<sup>2</sup>Department of Human Kinetics And Health Education, University Of Nigeria, Nsukka

**\*Corresponding author: Okechukwu Kingsley Oforka. Email:  
kingsley.oforka@unn.edu.ng**

### **Abstract**

Recreation which does not have a universal definition but has been described by various researchers is an important part of life. It has various benefits including being useful to health and wellbeing. This paper reviewed the health benefits of recreation. The paper focused on describing the concept of recreation. Recreational activities were defined, and the various health benefits including physical health benefits, mental health and social health benefits were discussed. The paper concluded among others that recreation though may not be appreciated by a lot of people helps one cope with the stress of daily activities. It also recommended among others that government should encourage and create awareness on the usefulness of recreation to health and national development.

**Keywords:** Recreation, Health, Benefits, Critical review, Health benefits

### **Introduction**

The importance of recreation in the life of a man cannot be over emphasized. It is indeed, part and parcel of good health. Man has always engaged in one type of recreational activity or the other during periods of leisure. Some people recreate for fun and relaxation, others recreate to lose weight and stay fit. There are still others who recreate to alleviate certain medical conditions, such as high blood pressure (Harthworth & Lewis, 2008). Due to the importance of recreation, it is expected that the global recreation market will grow from \$1253.24 billion in 2020 to \$1425.74 billion in 2021 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13.8%. According to the Recreation Global Report (2021), the market is expected to reach \$1916.35 billion in 2025 at a CAGR of 8%. The report showed that Asia Pacific was the largest region in the global recreation market, accounting for 33% of the market in 2020. North America was the second largest region accounting for 30% of the global market. Africa was the smallest region in the global recreation market.

Recreation is an activity that diverts, amuses or stimulates. It involves activities that refreshes and renews one's health and spirit by enjoyment and relaxation. Fawole (2001) described recreation as any socially desirable leisure activity in which an individual participates in voluntarily, and from which immediate continuing satisfaction can be derived.

It is a distinct phase of human activity, which is beneficial and constructive to the health of an individual and usually done at leisure (Masterton, 2008).

Leisure signifies individual's choice to spend his or her discretionary time fulfilling certain interests or needs or performing a gratifying experience for the sake of wellness or personal development (Alli, 2007; Barcelona, 2002). Participation in physical leisure activities affects quality of life and life satisfaction of an individual. A body of literature expressed the fact that comprehensive work – based physical leisure activity programme can yield promising health behaviour changes of individuals (Jennen & Uhlenback, 2004). The National Association for Sports and Physical Education (2003) observed that participation in leisure activities makes one fit, gives participants more energy, greater mental alertness, reduced stress and allows for better time management. Findings (Masterton, 2008) reveal that participation in physical leisure activities may contribute to positive health and enhance life satisfaction and ability to improve an individual's capability to withstand stress. Similarly, recreation has the power to create social cohesion and increased productivity, prevent cardiovascular diseases, reduces the risk of diabetes and improves plasma lipid, and reduce premature mortality and morbidity (American College of Sports Medicine, 2015; Barcelona, 2002; Fadoju & Alleta, 2010; Stewart, 2004; Tompkins, Bosh, Chenowith, Taide, & Swin, 2008). Recreation enhances self – esteem, self-confidence and self concept, reduces obesity, serves as preventive mechanism for risk behaviour, prevent disabilities associated with old age and reduces fatigue, prevents metabolic syndrome, nurtures holistic sense of wellness, promote psychological, conversely, physical and environmental benefits Harworth and Lewis (2008).

### **Concept of Recreation**

Recreation is a term which has no universally agreed-on definition. Recreation according to Russel (2009) means voluntary participation in leisure activities that are meaningful and enjoyable to the person involved. The author opined that the term embraces both indoor and outdoor activities and refers to sports and exercise as well as to less physically active pursuits. As this definition makes clear, recreation is one aspect of the broader term leisure, which encompasses not only vigorous activities such as softball and hiking but also sedentary hobbies.

The concept of recreation presents a basis for solving human problems. Leitner and Leitner (2012) opined that recreation pursuits offer man the chance of activating his essential potential (a free development of the will, intelligence, sense of responsibility and creative

faculty). Also, Cordes (2013) stated that recreation present a possibility of enriching life through participation in physical recreation and sports, through an enjoyment of art, science and nature. It creates a basis for compensating for many of the demands placed upon man by today's way of life.

Recreation accords one a deviation from normal activities to helps relaxation. Oloyede (2004) described recreation as an activity voluntarily engaged in during leisure and motivated by the personal satisfaction derived from participation, which is also beneficial to health. The benefits, according to Adisa and Olayede (2011), is derivable from engagement in these activities which are physical and multi-dimensional affecting the basic health components positively namely, physical health, mental health, social health, emotional health, environmental health and spiritual health. Recreation in various games and sports pursuit improves health of participants and prepares them fit for daily activities. Participation in recreation can contribute significantly to maintaining emotional stability and wellbeing, offering pleasure, satisfaction, self-esteem, providing a sense of well-being, sense of recreative and personnel accomplishment and creating a sense of belonging. In support of the above assertion, Crompton (2009) stated that active participation in recreation groomed citizens physically, socially, mentally, physiologically and environmentally sound individuals, producing balanced and hardworking fit citizens, thereby creating a disciplined, productive and stable nation where peace and unity prevail. Participation in recreation has remained an important behavioural lifestyle for promoting and maintaining recreational experience, social, emotional and psychological well-being and physical health. Recreational activities have become important globally that it has increasingly attracted the interest of not just to the school age participation but to people of all ages in non school settings such as community and fitness centres.

### **Recreational Activity**

The meaning of recreational activities has been conceptualized by different researchers in order to give a wider understanding of the concept in focus. Busheh (2004) described it as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that result in an expenditure of energy. These activities can be of low, moderate and high intensities. Russel (2009) observed that regardless of its level of intensity, recreational activities have psychological, social and cognitive values. According to Leitner and Leitner (2012), a recreational activity is any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscle that increases energy expenditure above a resting level. A recreational activity can be a

leisure activity (e.g., gardening), sports focused (e.g., basketball and volley ball). While others may be work-related (e.g., lifting) and transport related (e.g. walking, slow running).

Recreational activities provide basis for interrelationship between psychological, cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of health by providing opportunities for participation in beneficial activities that enhances physical performance.

### **Benefits of Participation in Recreation**

Recreation has many worthwhile health benefits. Leitner and Leitner (2012) observed that recreation gives room for creative self expression, helps to promote total health; physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. It provides an antidote to the strains and tensions of life provide an avenue to abundant personal and family living and develop effective citizenship and vitalize democracy. Cordes (2013) further describes the following points as health benefits of recreation participation:

1. To provide personal fulfillment recreation exposes individuals to experiences that are capable of making them realize their dreams and goals.
2. To influence individual on democratic approach to live. The fact that recreation is voluntary is an indication that it is democratic in nature. Therefore, it contributes to individual's life without recreating their right or creating hindrances to the achievement of their needs
3. To develop leisure skills and interest in individual, recreation aims at meeting the interest of people and developing skills that will provide the incentive, motivation and medium for spending free time in a constructive and worthwhile manner
4. To promote health and body fitness. The exposure to different activities and experiences help in alleviating many health problems, such as: mental stress, tension, psychological imbalance, and physical inactivity prevailing in our society
5. To develop and promote adventure and creative spirit or instinct. In the course of participation, the experiences and activities that people are exposed to give them opportunity for personal and creative expression. People are motivated to explore into new experiences or activities.
6. To inculcate sense of and appreciation of aesthetic recreation to promote the natural endowment of every environment. It therefore, not only accommodates the preservation and promotion of nature in its programme, but influences participation to recognize and appreciate beauty of nature. It makes people aware and appreciate the aesthetic and cultural values.

7. To develop and promote an environment that will meet up with the challenges pose by leisure. Recreation encourages preservation of natural resources, construction of playground recreation and tourist centers.

Non participation in recreation is the second most important risk factor after tobacco use that contribute to the burden of diseases morbidity and mortality.

### **Physical Health Benefits of Recreation**

Recreational involve activities that are beneficial to any active individual, irrespective of whether they are recreational or commercial activities. A study has shown that active participation in recreational activities can reduce anxiety level or worry, and as well contributes many benefits to our physical well being (National Association for Sports & Physical Education, 2003). Among the benefits gained from recreational activities are improvements of the lung system, strengthening the heart muscles an increasing its size (Pigram, 2003). The author added that, a person who recreate actively and regularly will be able to adopt active lifestyle, look more attractive and experience changes in moods and self-esteem. Recreational activities are very significant to the development of any individual, young, and old, men and women, boys and girls. Individuals, young and old who partake in recreational activities actively, have the chance of living longer in life than the sedentary who do not consider recreation important for their life (Fadoju & Aletta, 2010). The author stated that, this is because for the system to effectively function, it requires some work-out that will enable the body act accordingly. Also, frequent and regular recreational activity boosts the immune system and lowers the incidence of heart disease, obesity and diabetes. (Fadoju & Aletta, 2010).

Asides its importance in lowering the incidence of heart diseases, obesity and diabetes, recreation can also have significant impact in the prevention of other hypokinetic conditions. A report of the American College of Sports Medicine (2015) showed that millions of people worldwide suffer from diseases that can be prevented or the symptoms improved through recreational activity. Recreational activity alone can reduce intra-abdominal visceral fat, which many scientists believe is the most dangerous kind, according to a controlled settle study of 117 women. Similarly, active participants of recreational activities are better protected against overweight and obese health risks, according to a review of 24 current articles evaluating health outcomes associated with recreational activity and body composition. Obese individuals who were active also had a lower incidence of disease and mortality than did normal-weight men and women who were sedentary (American College of Sport Medicine, 2015).

## **Mental Health Benefits of Recreation**

Regular physical activity during recreation can reduce the severity of many mental health disorders, enabling individuals to better cope with their daily lives (Russel, 2009). Studies (Leitner & Leitner, 2012) have documented the positive impacts that recreation can have in mental health, from reducing depression and relieving stress, to improving quality of life in a variety of ways, to helping people to feel better about both their surroundings and themselves.

Recreation and leisure activities can help alleviate depression. Participating in recreational activities provides people with experience, they look forward to and enjoy. Recreational activities also reduce alienation, loneliness and isolation all of which contribute to depression. This is because, it provides a social atmosphere that draws people out-of their houses and into community life. Siegenthaler (2007) noted a positive correlation between participation in three leisure activities and decreased depression that was found in a study of 7,432 people. The study found out that the more time spent in participating on hobbies, swimming and visiting friends, the more their depression decreased. Ho, Payne and Sega (2003) posited that mentally recalling outdoor recreational activities increases positive moods which are linked to improved self-esteem, lowered depression and reduced suicide rates. Similarly, Morgan (2004) observed that children who are depressed or have emotional problems benefit from increased levels of recreational activity, lowering their levels of depression. Tarrant, Manfreda, and Driver (2004) opined that the likelihood of depression was reduced by the size of someone's social network, their level of physical activity and how often they interacted with friends during recreational activities.

Depression is a mental illness that comes in several forms. The symptoms include feeling of loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and worthlessness, deep, unshakable sadness, diminished interest in activities, and thoughts of suicide. Depression is a disease affecting people of all ages. An estimated 34 million adult suffered depression sometimes in their life (Kessler et al., 2003). Rest, relaxation and revitalization through recreational activity are essential to managing stress in today's busy and demanding world Department of Park and Recreation (DPR) (2003) pointed out that positive and enjoyable recreation experiences can decrease stress, anxiety and psychological tensions. The study found that more than 75% of respondents cited relaxing and 59% reducing tension as very important factors influencing the enjoyment of their favourite recreational activities.

Stress reduction through recreation also comes from group activities that strengthen social ties and the calming effects of desirable outdoor setting. Being more relaxed promotes improved work performance, better social interactions, and a general sense of well-being, all of which reduce stress. Another focus-group study of older women, participants reported that leisure gave them an escape from daily stress and helped them cope with such major traumas as a death in the family (Siegenthaler, 2007). Reductions in stress associated with recreational activities were found in well over 100 studies of recreation experiences in wilderness and urban nature areas (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). A study by Ho, Payne, and Orsega (2003) found that participants felt significantly calmer and less anxious at the recreation park than at home, and the longer they stayed at the park, the less stressed they became, according to interviews with 186 nature recreationists. Frank and Gustafson (2001) posited that positive self-esteem and self-image can be achieved through lifestyle choices by selecting recreational activities that contribute to a feeling of control over one's life. The authors stressed that increasing our skill levels and success at a recreational activity builds our self-confidence and esteem which in turns affects other facets of our lives, such as family and work. Self-expression and identity affirmation is positively reinforced through participation in recreational activities.

Recreation helps us explore our inner spirit, aid sense of self, creating new behaviours and a new identity. Improved mental engagement, increased self-awareness, and clarification of values-all gained through introspection, creative engagement and expression of spiritual renewal, which are some of the scientifically documented outdoor recreation benefits that develop and enhance social systems. Recreational activity is important to personal life satisfaction and those who participate in recreation are notably happier. A study (Russel, 2009) found that those who recreate more often are likely to be completely satisfied with their choice of careers, friends and their perceived success in life. According to the researcher, evidence strongly suggests that participation in outdoor recreation leads people to have more satisfying and fulfilling lives.

### **Social Health Benefits of Recreation**

Recreation opportunities can have positive impacts on our society. Living in urban areas presents a wide range of social conditions influencing the way we live, work and recreate. Numerous studies support the link between participation in outdoor recreation and increased concern for the environment (Adisa & Olayede, 2011). Survey opinions and crime

statistics also support the link between open spaces, recreation and reduced crime (Adisa & Olayede, 2011).

Outdoor recreation increases participants political involvement in environmental issues. Experience in the natural environment beginning at early age, encourages recreationists to become involved with, and successful in, promoting many environmental issues. Optimal outdoor recreation experiences can result in a state of connectedness with the earth and its creatures, which in turn, can result in greater sense of appreciation for the environment and the community life. A study further refined the connection between outdoor recreation and environmental concern, identifying a correlation between the frequency of outdoor recreational activity and the spectrum of environmental activism (Russel, 2009).

Studies have shown that families that recreate together tend to be closer and more cohesive, and have a greater chance of staying together. This is true with both parent-child relationships and married couples. When families participate together in leisure activities, bonding can occur, and the related benefits can include family satisfaction, interaction and stability. Recreation opportunities provide a means for social interaction that can help to break down the barriers of unfamiliarity, fear and isolation. During recreation and leisure time, people are less concerned with differences and more concerned with having fun. The strength of a community is increased through recreational activities that allow people to share their cultural and ethnic differences. All play situations provide ample testimony that once the game starts, social distinctions disappear and the status of participants is determined by their ability to play the game.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of recreation to the overall health development is not well appreciated by many people. Recreation helps people to cope with the day-to-day stress within their environment. Engaging in recreation is a way of promoting physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing. However, government should make it a point of duty to encourage and create the awareness about the usefulness of recreation by providing recreational facilities in schools and communities and to ensure these facilities are not left to waste away, Also, government should embark on enlightenment campaign through the mass media on the value of recreation to health and national development.



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